帝都の精霊大祭

精霊使いの剣舞

志瑞祐

Extra.1

Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance - BR SS Compilation

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Great Festival of the Spirits at the Imperial Capital

Part 1

"Hah—!"

With a silver flash, the slicing attack ripped through the darkness.

Jet-black feathers instantly scattered, disappearing into space as particles of light.

—But that was all.

There was no sensation of having inflicted a critical blow.

"...!"

"Fufu, what a shame, Kamito. But you've still got far to go—"

A flutter of gorgeous hair, bearing the color of night.

Accompanied by a swish of pale fingers in the darkness, lightning erupted in the next instant.

With an earsplitting crack, the dagger in the boy's hand shattered from one strike of lightning. This was an elemental waffe formed from a steel spirit with whom he had made a simple contract.

While clicking his tongue, the boy retreated. Drawing his backup weapon—a mithril dagger—he searched for the enemy presence lurking in the darkness.

(Where are you, darkness spirit—?)

While pouring divine power to make the blade glow and confirm his footing, the boy cautiously moved around.

This battle arena of the Instructional School, with its complicated landscape, was a place of death. One misstep would bring the same fate as those countless corpses that had been struck down into the bottom of the abyss.

Although the Instructional School's elders firmly believed this boy to be the reincarnation of the Demon King from a thousand years ago, they had no intention of safeguarding his life because of that.

Suppose he were to die here, then it would only mean that his capacity was insufficient to become the Demon King's successor. That was all.

Suddenly, the boy noticed slight movement in the darkness.

(Over there huh—)

Through instinct alone, the boy threw the dagger, infused with divine power.

—However, the presence had already vanished. Flashing silver, the blade flew across empty space.

"...!?"

"It's still too early for you to kill me—"

—Before he knew it.

The presence had moved to his back.

Pale fingers, soft and smooth, caressed the boy's neck.

Instantly, the lightning surging through his entire body made him lose consciousness.

Part 2

"...mito, hey, Kamito... Are you okay?"

"...Ooh, hmm..."

He felt a hand's cold touch on his forehead.

A ticklish feeling of hair came from his cheek.

From the comfort of light sleep, he opened his eyes slightly—

Only to see dusk-colored eyes looking at him with a worried expression.

"...!"

The boy—Kamito—hastily tried to get up, but she held his head down.

"You'll feel dizzy if you get up suddenly."

"...Don't treat me... as a child, darkness spirit..."

"Indeed you are a child. What a shame, as you are now, you cannot kill me."

Keeping Kamito's head resting on her lap, the girl chuckled.

She was the darkness spirit of the highest rank—Restia Ashdoll.

Sent to educate the Demon King's successor, she was his final and most formidable opponent.

Despite having defeated numerous fighters to obtain the Instructional School's number one seat at the mere age of nine, Kamito had yet to gain the upper hand over this darkness spirit, not even for one move or a half.

"...L-Let go of me..."

"Your body should still be numb. Just rest here for a while."

The slender fingers were gently caressing Kamito's hair.

Feeling like his strength had drained all of a sudden, Kamito could not help but relax his body.

"Yes, this is right. Until your paralysis subsides, I'll just tell a bedtime story."

"..."

Hearing that, Kamito gave up on resisting, closing his eyes.

This was because the bedtime stories she told were Kamito's only avenue for learning about the outside world, and it was very interesting information.

"...Go ahead if you want."

"How very unforthright."

The darkness spirit girl shrugged slightly.

"...Hmm, well then, let's talk about the imperial capital today."

"Imperial capital?"

"Yes. The Ordesia Empire's capital, Ostdakia. Have you heard of the name?"

"Something like the most magnificent city on the continent, right..."

Looking up at the sky, Kamito muttered.

"Indeed. It was the stronghold city built by the holy maiden Areishia who vanquished the Demon King a thousand years ago. Its outer walls are very solid with many guardian spirits protecting it. The city center is where the Nefescal Palace sits, surrounded by a vast garden, with the residences of nobles around—"

The darkness spirit girl talked about the imperial capital's details one by one.

However, this would be too concise to call a bedtime story. Her tone of voice was like reciting facts that had been prepared ahead of time.

Lying on the girl's lap, Kamito was already yawning. Her bedtime stories in the past were much more interesting, enough to pique the young Kamito's curiosity.

"I think that's enough about the imperial capital. Instead, I want to hear more about the mountain ranges where many dragons live inside the Dracunia Empire—"

"Haha, the imperial capital is very boring, huh?"

Restia smiled wryly and shrugged.

"But this is necessary information, you know?"

"...What do you mean?"

Just as Kamito asked in return...

"Don't go pouring useless information into the Demon King's successor, darkness spirit—"

Figures clad in gray robes appeared silently out of the darkness.

They were the absolute rulers of this facility—the instructors of the Instructional School.

"I'm just providing the necessary information for the mission."

Restia glared coldly at the old men.

Her voice was exceptionally cold, completely different from how she spoke to Kamito.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, darkness spirit."

"Never forget that we can seal you away any time."

"...Of course I know that."

Restia whispered. Her voice was trembling.

Kamito rose up from her lap.

"A mission for me?"

He asked the old men.

"Yes. Next, we are sending you to the imperial capital."

"The imperial capital..."

Looking back abruptly, Kamito saw Restia nodding affirmatively.

"You will steal the militarized spirits used in the Great Festival of the Spirits at the imperial capital"

The old men's ominous voices echoed in the darkness.

Part 3

—That was four days ago.

Infiltrating a caravan of merchants in the trade of spirit crystal smuggling, they had arrived at the imperial capital two days earlier through a trading city in the desert. After sneaking into the city, they lay low in a hiding place prepared by the Instructional School while gathering information.

This was a room with no windows in a cheap inn.

From outside the musty room, the cheers of large crowds could be

heard.

(Finally, the day is here...?)

The Great Festival of the Spirits was a celebration held once a year in the imperial capital. Kamito's mission was to steal the militarized spirits that were scheduled to be unveiled during the festival.

After adjustments, militarized spirits could fetch astronomical prices on the black market, even if they were from ancient generations. The main buyers were small countries that were unable to develop their own military capabilities.

But this time, the militarized spirits to be stolen were no ordinary ones.

According to sources, the militarized spirits to be unveiled were originally from the seventy-two spirits used by Demon King Solomon before undergoing adjustments. Assuming this was true, it was hardly surprising that the old men of the Instructional School, being worshipers of the Demon King, would be willing to take the risk to obtain them.

(...Those two haven't been caught by the spirit knights, right?)

Teamed up with Kamito in this mission were the fighters ranked second and seventh.

Number Seven, Lily Flame, was in charge of gathering information in the imperial capital and securing avenues of retreat. Number Two, Muir Alenstarl the Monster, was to use her special ability to make spirits go berserk and attack the plaza where the princess maiden was going to dance as an offering to the spirits. As for Kamito, his task was to take advantage of the chaos during the attack to seize the catalysts where the militarized spirits were sealed. These were the main points of the operation.

Those two should be hiding somewhere else in the imperial capital but Kamito was not informed of the specifics. Regular communications was the responsibility of several spies in the city.

—Thud.

At this moment, the faint sound of a cup being put down was heard from a corner in the room.

"Kamito, how much longer are you going to stay in this gloomy room?"

Still sitting on the floor, Kamito opened one eye.

He saw the darkness spirit girl sitting in a chair, looking at him with an exasperated expression on her face.

"The mission begins after the princess maiden begins her dance performance. There's no need to go out."

Replying curtly with these two sentences, Kamito closed his eyes again.

Sitting on the floor with his hands in a meditative pose, he concentrated. Raising his focus in this manner before carrying out an important mission was his habit.

"You're wrong. Although it's a bit weird coming from me as a darkness spirit, do know that it's nice to be under the sun sometimes. On a rare visit to the imperial capital, how could you stay cooped in a room all the time?"

"Going out only increases unnecessary risk."

"Sigh, what am I going to do with you..."

Sighing, Restia stood up from her chair.

The gradually approaching presence forced Kamito to open his eyes.

"...W-What are you doing?"

"Listen carefully."

Smiling tenderly, Restia pulled Kamito's ear hard.

"...R-Restia... W-What are you doing!?"

"No matter how tolerant I am, there are times when even I get angry. Got that, Kamito?"

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble...!

Restia was giving off a dark aura from her entire body.

Faced with this top-ranked darkness spirit's astounding pressure,

Kamito could not help but feel fear.

"I, starting yesterday, have felt extremely bored."

Bringing her smiling face close to Kamito, Restia showed no smile in her eyes.

"Very well, we shall go out—"

"Can't you just go out on your own?"

Despite Kamito's continued resistance, Restia grabbed him by the back of the neck.

"Kamito, this is a lesson."

"Lesson?"

"Yes. I am teaching you the techniques for melding into the crowd seamlessly when infiltrating cities."

Smiling, Restia forced Kamito outside.

Part 4

—Meanwhile at the same time...

Inside the Elstein family's alternate residence within the premises of the Nefescal Palace, a princess maiden presiding over this year's Great Festival of the Spirits was currently preparing for the dance performance.

"Wow, Nee-sama, you're so pretty!"

Seeing the princess maiden dressed in ceremonial garb, the girl with crimson hair exclaimed.

Her hair was styled into twintails on the sides of her head. Spinning rapidly, her ruby-like eyes looked very cute.

The girl's name was Claire Elstein.

She was the nine-year-old and second daughter of Duke Elstein.

"Thank you, Claire—"

Hearing that, the princess maiden smiled gently and responded.

She was Rubia Elstein, both Claire's blood sister as well as the Divine Ritual Institute's premier princess maiden, the candidate for the Fire Elemental Lord's next Queen.

Tasked with presiding over the final ceremony in this Great Festival of the Spirits, she was shouldering the most important mission.

"The bosom area of this ceremonial outfit is a little loose..."

Looking down at the gap in front of her chest, Rubia sighed. The fact that her bust was slightly smaller than girls of similar age did cause this princess maiden, who could be called perfect in all respects, a slight sense of inferiority.

"Just stuff something inside. It'll be fine."

"...I-I guess you're right. Claire, could you help comb my hair?"

"Sure, Nee-sama—"

Claire nodded and slowly combed the long crimson hair in a clumsy manner.

This gorgeous hair, resembling flames, mesmerized even Claire as the younger sister.

"I hope the summoning dance will finish peacefully without incident, Nee-sama."

"Rumor has it that the Lindwyrm being entertained as the main guest is especially difficult to please among the irritable dragon spirits. An inexperienced dance isn't going to satisfy him."

"Please don't push yourself too far. After all, your body is a bit frail, Nee-sama."

"My juniors at the Divine Ritual Institute said the same thing to me."

Rubia smiled.

"Don't worry, I won't overdo it."

She stood up straight.

Her noble and elegant mannerisms were making Claire exclaim wow, utterly impressed.

Embroidered with a fire dragon design, the white ceremonial outfit was custom made for this Great Festival of the Spirits. The coronet adorning her crimson hair was decorated with spirit crystals of varying sizes, serving to enhance this princess maiden's beauty.

Woof, woof!

—Just at this moment, barking could be heard from the mansion's courtyard.

"Good grief, how much longer will you make a lady like me wait!?"

Claire looked out the window to see an angry blonde girl with a white wolf.

"Oh no! I promised Rinslet-chan to walk around the festival with her!"

Covering her mouth, Claire began to get anxious.

"Don't mind me, go enjoy yourself at the festival."

Seeing that, Rubia placed her hand on Claire's head.

"O-Okay! I'll look forward to your dance performance, Nee-sama!"

Nodding, Claire frantically rushed outside.

Part 5

The bazaar located near the imperial capital's east gate was where merchants gathered from all over the continent. During the Great Festival of the Spirits, this was a place where massive crowds frequented the open-air stalls.

"The princess maiden this year seems to be Duke Elstein's eldest daughter—"

"Now that's a prodigy who entered the Divine Ritual Institute at the youngest age. This year's Great Festival of the Spirits is surely gonna be a success!"

Mixed among the noise of the lively festivities, two people were walking in the streets.

"Kamito, your gaze is too sharp."

"Shut up..."

Retorting unhappily, Kamito quickened his pace.

The two of them were dressed in long overcoats with their heads wrapped in stoles. This was typical attire of desert merchants.

Due to a large number of immigrants from the Alphas Theocracy living in the imperial capital's eastern zone, dressing like this in the crowd did not look out of place.

"Hey, wait up. Our cover story is a pair of siblings!"

Hearing that, Kamito halted and looked back.

"...You and I are merely traveling together due to a mission. Don't get in my way."

Saying that, he prepared to start walking again.

"Okay, watch out or we'll get separated."

"Don't touch me, darkness spirit!"

Restia reached out to hold Kamito's hand but he shook her off forcefully.

The surrounding pedestrians looked at them in puzzlement.

"Sorry, nothing's going on here..."

Restia unwrapped her stole and glanced around.

Her dusk-colored eyes instantly produced a mysterious glow. In the next instant, people continued on their way, ignoring the two of them as though nothing had happened.

"Okay, let's go—"

"..."

With a very reluctant look, Kamito followed behind her.

The main street was filled with festive music. The fragrance of fruit could be smelled from open-air stalls.

Following Restia into a restaurant, the two of them took seats facing the street.

"...Phew, a festival sure is nice. I haven't been this free for a thousand years already."

Sitting on a chair, the darkness spirit girl stretched her arms comfortably.

Naturally, she had not manifested her jet-black wings on her back.

Placed on the table were two fruit parfaits that she had ordered. Kamito did not touch them, simply glaring at Restia.

"Why must I team up with you? I can do it on my own."

"If you were on your own, Kamito, you would've been caught by the Imperial Knights in no time, tortured and interrogated in Balsas Prison right now."

While eating the strawberries in the parfait, she glanced at the building towering in the center of the imperial capital.

It was said that inside the famous Balsas Prison was a jail specialized for imprisoning elementalists. Once captured, even an Instructional School combatant would find it impossible to escape.

"Torture doesn't work on me."

"...That's not the issue here."

Restia sighed in exasperation.

"Looks like it was correct for me to follow you—"

Saying that, she placed the other parfait in front of Kamito.

"Here, eat up."

"I'm fine with this. It's enough for three days."

Kamito shook his head and took out a small bag from his overcoat's pocket.

He poured out two or three pills from the bag.

This was food made by mixing several herbs with honey and drying it. Instructional School combatants would also carry these on their person during long-term missions.

"...Like I said, that's not the issue here. You're going to raise suspicions around you."

"...?" Hearing that, Kamito looked up with a surprised face.

Couples in the surroundings were looking at them with eyes of suspicion.

Restia silently reached out and took the bag of pills under the table.

"..."

Staring at the parfait, Kamito lowered his head without moving.

"What's the matter?"

Seeing Kamito frozen, Restia asked.

"...How, what's the right way?"

"Huh?"

"...This thing, how to eat it."

While looking away in embarrassment, Kamito asked quietly.

Restia chuckled then said:

"Very well, let me teach you."

Scooping out a spoonful of ice cream, she extended it in front of Kamito.

"Open your mouth."

"...S-Stop joking around, I can eat by myself!"

"That won't do. We won't look like a couple, right?"

Restia glanced at the couple on the adjacent table.

...The girl was asking the boy to say "ah~"

"Huh!? I thought our cover story was siblings—"

Yelling in panic, Kamito swiftly found his mouth stuffed by Restia's spoon.

"...!"

"How is it?"

(...What the heck!?)

Having almost forgotten the taste of sweetness, Kamito was entranced for a moment—

"—This year, it's Rubia-oneesama presiding over the ceremony."

Suddenly, the voices of two girls walking in the streets outside the restaurant could be heard.

"This year's Great Festival of the Spirits will surely be a success. In a few years, I'll make ritual offerings to the great Elemental Lords too!"

"Always nervous in front of crowds, you wouldn't be able to do it."

"Th-That's not true, I'll definitely become like Nee-sama in the future—"

"...There there. Look, it is already starting—"

Soon, the two gradually faded into the distance. Listening to their voices—

Kamito recovered a grim face like a fighter's.

"—Confirming the next move."

He lowered his voice as though muttering to himself.

"Once the Princess Maiden of Flame begins the ceremony, Muir's militarized spirit will take action. While the Imperial Knights are in turmoil, we will go steal the sealed spirits that were meant to be used in the ritual—"

Restia smiled faintly and wiped off ice cream that was sticking to Kamito's cheek.

"...!?"

"It's time to go—"

"There's still plenty of time before the mission."

"What are you talking about? It's not every day you get a festival, you know?"

Restia extended her hand towards Kamito who was still sitting in his chair.

"Come on, hurry up, will you?"

"..."

"Cover story is siblings, right?"

Lowering his head, Kamito held that hand.

"...Only because of the mission."

Part 6

While holding hands with Restia, Kamito walked along the noisy streets.

While the sun was setting, a large crowd began to gather in the plaza.

"The ritual is about to start..."

"Yes. Once the sun sets fully, the bell will ring in the city. Then a massive portable shrine will come out."

"Riding it will be the Princess Maiden of Flame, right?"

Looking up at the countless spirits flying in the night sky as balls of light, Kamito whispered.

Suddenly, Restia halted, causing Kamito almost to trip and fall.

"...What's wrong, darkness spirit?"

Restia was looking at a silver hair ornament displayed at an open-air stall.

"That's quite a pretty hair ornament. May I have a look?"

"Wow, you've got good eyes, miss. This is a silver ornament crafted in the Theocracy."

The stall's owner made a friendly smile and rubbed his hands together.

"Let me see."

Restia unwrapped her stole with a flutter of her long and gorgeous hair the color of the night.

Seeing her otherworldly beauty, the stall owner gasped.

"The mission above all. Don't act conspicuously, darkness spirit."

"Don't worry. ...Hmm, does it look good?"

Putting on the hair ornament the stall owner had handed to her, Restia looked slightly shy. It was a side to her that Kamito had never seen before, making a certain type of unknown feeling rampage in Kamito's heart.

"...Who knows."

Seeing Kamito look away, she smiled mischievously.

"Kamito, will you buy it for me?"

"...You can buy it yourself, right?"

"I didn't bring any money."

"If it's you—"

You can easily use mind control, right? Before Kamito could finish his retort, he found his lips—

Pressed shut by a swift index finger.

"Seriously, it's times like these that are only natural if the younger brother buys it for the sister."

Restia spoke softly in a sulking voice.

"...Is that really how it works?"

Even as the Instructional School's strongest fighter, Kamito knew almost nothing about this kind of common sense in the outside world. He wondered if the stall owner might get suspicious if he were to refuse stubbornly at this time.

"...Fine, I'll take this one."

Kamito paid the stall owner with a silver coin.

"Thank you, Kamito—"

Accepting the hair ornament, Restia smiled and knelt down in front of Kamito.

"Okay, could you help me put it on?"

"...Something so small, you can do it yourself, right?"

"Like I said, this is what a younger brother ought to do."

"..."

Kamito swallowed his words and reluctantly pinned the hair ornament.

"Hmmm, this somehow feels a bit embarrassing..."

"Don't do anything redundant, darkness spirit—"

Kamito glared at her. Just then...

A loud bell sounded throughout the city streets.

Part 7

The sun had completely set and night had fallen.

Lights from flying spirits dotted the night sky while noisy festive music resounded everywhere. This was supposed to be a scene conveying the solemnity of the Great Festival of Spirits to everyone, but Kamito was not moved the slightest.

"—Spirit knights as bodyguards, four of them huh."

Some distance away from the plaza where the dance offering was to take place, Kamito was on a building's rooftop.

Lying in a prone position, he observed the massive portable shrine advancing through the main street. The palanquin's four corners had mini-shrines for keeping magic apparatus within them.

These were the four militarized spirits that were about to be unveiled to the public.

On the stage, a princess maiden with brilliant flame-like crimson hair was preparing for the ritual.

The biggest ceremony in the Great Festival of the Spirits was the ritual dance performance offered by the princess maiden.

Pulling up his mask, Kamito leaned out from the roof.

"Let's do it, darkness spirit—"

"Fufu, affirmative."

Scattering jet-black feathers, Restia landed on the roof.

In the next instant, her figure vanished, turning into a dagger.

The jet-black blade looked as though it was forged from endless darkness itself.

Named the "Stinger," the Dagger of Black Death, this was not an elemental waffe formed from a spirit contract. It was nothing more than a weapon formed according to her will. This was a branch of shapeshifting spirit magic only accessible to a fraction of top-ranked spirits.

Kamito silently pulled out the dagger that was stabbed into an innocent family's roof.

The dagger was unexpectedly light and extremely to his liking.

Carrying the Princess Maiden of Flame, the portable shrine arrived in front of the plaza.

The music stopped and the huge crowd held their breath. Just at that instant...

A blinding flash of light exploded on the plaza.

Part 8

Suddenly ripping through space, a massive berserk spirit appeared in the middle of the plaza.

A giant beast of steel, all covered in sharp blades, commonly called the Beast of Gévaudan, it was a militarized spirit that had been deployed by the Ordesia Empire in older eras.

The spirit's sudden intrusion caused a wave of screams as the crowd entered a state of panic.

The steel beast's massive limbs swept away the open-air stalls, piercing buildings built from stone. A cloud of dust rose in the surroundings. Spirits flying in the sky flashed violently.

Having lost its rationality to Muir Alenstarl's Jester's Vise, the spirit was currently in state of rampage. Before getting broken from use, it was probably going to keep engaging in destruction at the plaza.

The spirit knights guarding the portable shrine instantly appeared. Releasing their elemental waffen, they charged at the berserk militarized spirit.

(Now is the chance—)

At the same time, Kamito took a leap in the darkness.

He swiftly moved across rooftops by leaping, approaching the portable shrine under the cover of darkness.

(Muir's militarized spirit can buy thirty seconds of time, I have to finish the job before that—"

Silently descending to the ground, he used his momentum to charge at the portable shrine.

Due to the dust cloud, his view was almost entirely blocked. However, he had already grasped the targets' locations.

Of the mini-shrines set up at the north, east, south, west corners of the portable shrine, two of them carried magic apparatus where the Demon King's spirits were sealed. All he needed to do was take the Demon King's spirits, he could ignore the other two.

Under the cover of darkness and the noisy commotion, Kamito jumped onto the edge of the giant portable shrine and ran to the north mini-shrine closest to him—

"Take that!"

The demon blade stabbed into the mini-shrine's door.

The door was easily broken, revealing the magic apparatus kept inside. The enshrined object was ancient single-edged blade. Sealed inside was the Demon King's spirit.

'—Indeed. Sealed here is the demon song spirit, Siren.'

Restia's voice sounded in his mind.

Forcibly cutting the barrier open, Kamito took the sword-shaped magic apparatus. Securing the heavy sword on his back, he immediately prepared to steal the next target—But just at that moment...

"...! You there, what are you doing here!"

An invisible slash swept lightly across Kamito's cheek from the darkness. Stepping back reflexively, he pulled away and faced off against the enemy.

(...A spirit knight huh.)

Standing before his eyes was a female knight using an elemental waffe in the form of a full moon blade.

Evidently only three of the knights had gone to suppress Muir's militarized spirit, leaving one to guard this place.

"...To think it's a child!?"

The knight could not believe her eyes for a moment, whispering—

But very soon, she noticed the sword on Kamito's back and exuded sharp killing intent.

"W-Watch this—"

Yelling, she swung the full moon blade horizontally.

The blade produced a gust of slicing wind flying towards him, scraping the roof of the portable shrine.

"...!"

Kamito used his demon blade to deflect the wind blade then hid desperately in the darkness.

The mission was ultimately about stealing the sealed spirits. There was nothing to gain from excess fighting.

(Muir's spirit will last for fifteen more seconds—)

"Don't think you can escape by jumping!"

Enveloped in fierce wind, the knight chased after him. She soon circled around in front of Kamito.

(...Gah, this sword is so heavy...!)

The sword sealing the Demon King's spirit was no small burden for Kamito's relatively small frame. Under such conditions, the assassination sword techniques of his specialty were unusable.

"Give up!"

Faced with the swinging full moon blade, Kamito hastily blocked with the Stinger.

"G-Gah...!"

A clash of blades. However, Kamito had no hopes of winning a pure contest of strength. Compared to the knight's weapon which was the elemental waffe of a contracted spirit, Kamito's demon blade was nothing more than an item transformed from Restia according to her own will. There was an overwhelming difference between the two.

'—You're hopeless, Kamito. I'll lend you a hand.'

At this moment, the demon blade spoke. Instantly, lightning erupted from the jet-black blade—!

"...Wha, ah, ahhhhhhhhhhh!"

Struck by black lightning, the knight screamed and backed away.

Seizing this opening, Kamito lunged forward—

"Hah!"

He stabbed the demon blade into the armor.

"...Guh, ah...!"

The sound of armor shattering. Eyes opened wide, the knight fell in the darkness.

"Huff, huff, huff—"

'Kamito, you didn't take a life, did you?'

Restia's voice was uncharacteristically anxious.

"I'm not gonna do something that stupid—"

While whispering, Kamito ran to the south side of the portable shrine.

As the Demon King's successor, Kamito was the only person in the Instructional School forbidden from taking human life despite being a trained assassin. This was because the old men believed that random commoners were unworthy of being the Demon King's first sacrifice. Only by personally killing the one he treasured most would the condition be fulfilled for the Demon King's awakening.

However, the treasured person who truly had value in being killed —For Kamito whose normal human emotions had been taken away, it was hard to imagine the day when he would find something like that—

'Good. After all, the one you must kill is—'

"Hold on, there's someone in front of the shrine!?"

Restia's whisper was overwhelmed by Kamito's voice.

Amidst the endless screaming—

That *girl* was unshaken by the surrounding chaos, standing quietly in the darkness.

She had crimson hair that resembled flames. With ruby eyes carrying unyielding determination, she glared at Kamito.

"—I know not who you are, but I shall not let you have this spirit!"

With a flutter of her ceremonial outfit's hem, the girl spoke solemnly.

(...C-Could this be the Princess Maiden of Flame!?)

Kamito silently groaned.

Her presence was completely unexpected. The instant Muir Alenstarl's militarized spirit appeared, she should have been evacuated by the bodyguard knights.

(...Did she stay back, intending to guard the sealed spirits?)

"Rubia-sama, it's very dangerous, please come back!"

Under the portable shrine, the guards wailed.

"No, guarding this place is my duty as a princess maiden. Please stand down."

Saying that, the Princess Maiden of Flame opened the door to the mini-shrine behind her.

She took out the enshrined sounding staff and silently prepared a stance.

The staff with the Demon King's spirit sealed in it had a gemstone embedded in its front end, glowing with bright red light.

'Kamito, watch out!'

"...! No way, she's planning to release that militarized spirit!?"

The princess maiden was clearly not an elementalist trained in combat. However, her divine power reserves would surpass an

ordinary spirit knight's.

Suppose that was true, then controlling a large militarized spirit singlehandedly was not impossible—

(Then I have to hurry before the militarized spirit is released—)

Holding the demon blade, Kamito rushed forward all at once.

However, a magic circle appeared at the princess maiden's feet in that instant, pouring a surge of blazing flames.

Appearing out of the magic circle was a two-headed hound all covered in flames. She must have set up automatically activating magic beforehand as a precaution.

"—Time to hunt, Lava Hound!"

The flaming hound pounced at Kamito's throat.

Kamito clicked his tongue and switched the demon blade to a reverse grip—

Then he drew out another mithril dagger from his chest.

"Assassination technique—Dual Snakes!"

Two slashes flew through the darkness, chopping the two-headed hound into halves.

However, just before vanishing, the lava hound turned into magical fire, roaring in Kamito's surroundings.

(Stalling for time eh—)

Kamito brushed the flames aside with the demon blade and rushed forward.

At this time, the Princess Maiden of Flame's incantation of release was about to finish.

"One of the Demon King's servants, ruling over blazing flames of crimson, show thyself at this time and place—"

'—Kamito, this is bad. Let's retreat.'

Restia's acute voice swept across his mind.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!

The roar of a beast came from the other side of the plaza. Either the spirit knights had defeated Muir's militarized spirit or the spirit had been broken by the Jester's Vise, self-destructing.

(...But the mission's objective is to steal two spirits of the Demon King's.)

'You have already stolen one successfully. That should be enough—'

Indeed, once the three spirit knights who had gone to the plaza returned, there was no hope of winning. Obsessing over the second spirit would also endanger Muir who was hiding nearby.

(...Gah, is the opportunity lost...?)

Just as Kamito decided to retreat and was about to turn around to leave...

(...My foot!?)

By the time he noticed, faint light was glowing underfoot.

This was *bind* magic for immobilizing someone.

(—I can't believe she can use spirit magic while chanting a releasing incantation!?)

Kamito groaned in surprise... It was almost impossible to believe. To be able to control such high-level spirit magic at such a young age, this talent was enough to rival the most elite of the continent's princess maidens, the Queens—

Hastily, Kamito stabbed the demon blade into the ground, dispelling the magic.

—However, it was too late. The Princess Maiden of Flame had already raised the sounding staff towards the sky.

"Thou shalt display the might of berserk violence—the hell flame spirit named Ifrit."

The instant she chanted the words of releasing...

The sounding staff in her hand erupted with intense light.

Appearing forth was a scarlet archdemon whose entire body was enveloped in scorching conflagration.

"O fool, repent your sins and turn into charcoal—"

Saying that, the Princess Maiden of Flame swung the sounding staff downwards.

The archdemon inhaled deeply and spewed flaming breath at Kamito.

"...!?"

Spreading radially, the flaming breath was too wide to escape.

Just a moment before Kamito was about to be devoured by the flames—

'—Don't worry, Kamito. I shall protect you.'

Restia's calm voice sounded.

The Stinger disappeared from Kamito's hand—

Then appearing before his eyes was the darkness spirit girl, spreading her twin wings of jet black.

"...Darkness spirit!? You—"

Restia lightly extended her hand at the crimson blaze.

With a flutter of gorgeous black hair, beautiful feathers of jet black scattered and incinerated.

"...Hmm, what... amazing, heat... As expected of, Demon King's spirit, ah... However—"

Restia blocked the overwhelming flames released by Ifrit.

Exuding dark miasma from her entire body, she blew the flames away.

"Huff, huff, huff..."

"Unbelievable, a humanoid high-ranked spirit!?"

The princess maiden exclaimed in surprise.

"Darkness spirit...!"

"Hurry and go, Kamito—"

"Ahhh—"

Carrying her emaciated form in his arms, Kamito vanished into the darkness.

Part 9

—After that, Kamito and his team escaped the imperial capital amidst the chaos.

Despite the heavy security at the entrances, through the escape route prepared by Lily beforehand, they were able to successfully mix themselves among a caravan heading for the Alphas Theocracy.

"—Mission failed huh."

The first experience made Kamito sigh.

He tightly gripped the sword containing the sealed Demon King's spirit.

"You managed to steal one of the Demon King's spirits. In terms of results, that's not bad at all."

Holding onto Kamito's back while on horseback, Restia shrugged and whispered.

"But carrying me in your arms to escape was such a poor decision. I'd simply return to Astral Zero if destroyed, so you should have escaped on your own back then—"

In contrast to her attitude, she seemed to be in quite a good mood.

"Once you disappear, coming back isn't so simple, is it? I need a weapon."

Kamito answered with a scowl.

"Well, whatever you say—"

Restia chuckled—Suddenly she placed her hand on the front of her hair.

"Too bad the ornament you bought for me was melted by that spirit's flames..."

"...That kind of thing can just be bought again."

"Huh?"

"...Nothing."

Giving the horse a lash with the whip, Kamito increased their speed.

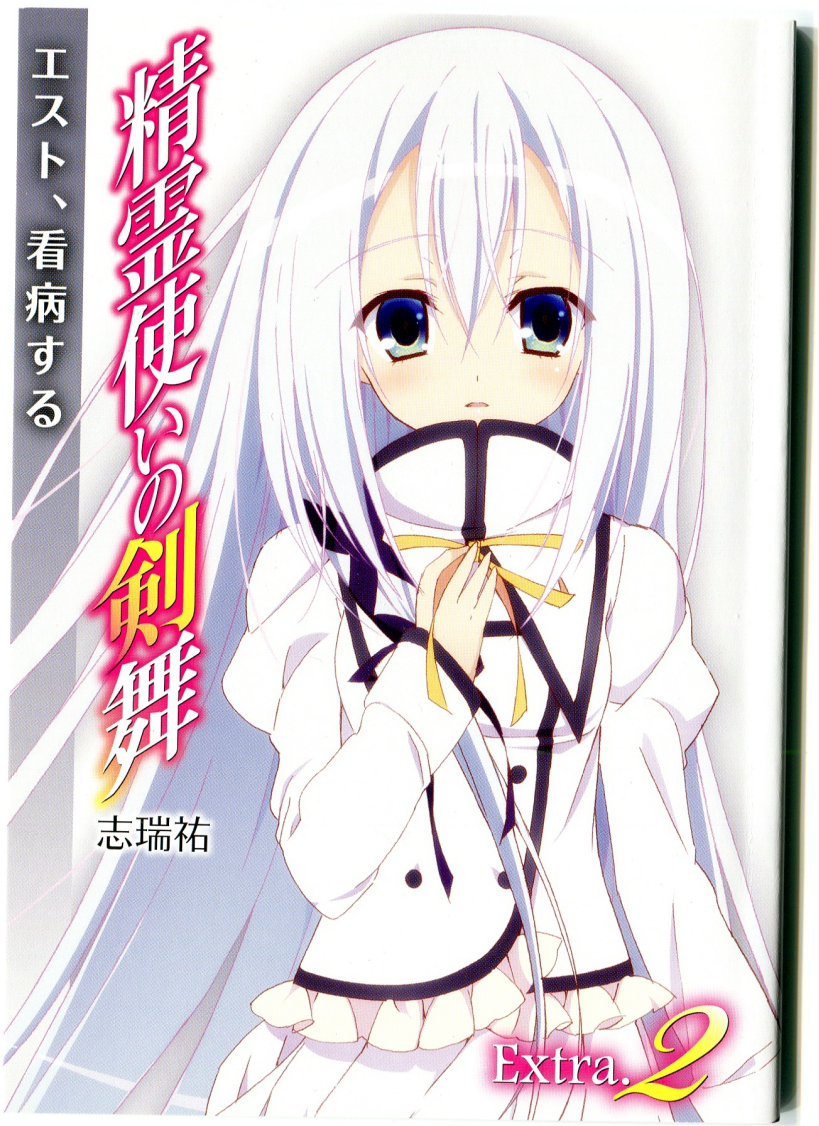
"Darkness spirit—"

"What is it, Kamito?"

"I will be the one to kill you... Before that happens, don't die by anyone else's hand."

"Very well. I'll look forward to it."

Est Looking After the Sick



Part 1

"...Ugh, hmm... Cough... Cough..."

One day, when Kamito woke in bed and opened his eyes, his body felt as heavy as lead.

That being said, the usual cause of this sensation, Est, was not responsible this time.

His entire body felt extremely sluggish, unable to even muster the strength to crawl out of bed.

Feeling like his throat was pricked by needles, Kamito coughed violently. He also seemed to have a fever.

"What the heck?"

Three days had already passed since the mission at the mining town. With Fianna's assistance, Kamito's team had defeated Jio Inzagi. After successfully applying a seal to the strategic-class militarized spirit, they had returned to the Academy.

Although nothing special happened when they first got back, it looked like Kamito had caught a flu.

Part 2

"...It's really weird for an elementalist to catch a flu!"

Bringing a basin of water with a towel, Claire remarked in surprise.

"It surprised me too! This has never happened to me at all... Cough... Cough."

Kamito coughed while answering.

Capable of refining divine power within themselves, elementalists were completely free of ordinary diseases. As for why Kamito had caught a flu, it was probably because he had depleted too much of his stamina. He really needed to rein in his divine power consumption.

"Well... I think you pushed yourself too far this time."

Claire murmured while wringing water out from the soaked towel.

"I guess I still haven't gotten used to using Est."

"...Maybe so."

Kamito's gaze shifted to that sword hanging on the wall at this time —Terminus Est.

During that battle against Jio Inzagi, Kamito had used Est's power to the limit. Perhaps as a result of overusing divine power, his immune system had become weak temporarily.

Est seemed to have consumed a massive amount of her own energy as a sword. Ever since then, she had remained in sword form.

"Well... Looks like you've no choice but to recuperate for a bit. Besides, even spirit magic cannot heal this type of condition."

"Yeah... I guess."

As a side note, although Fianna had diagnosed him, even an expert in healing magic such as her had confirmed that it was nothing more than an ordinary flu. Healing magic used the power of holy spirits to increase natural regeneration. It was very effective against external injuries, but in cases of diseases with unknown origins, it would probably exacerbate uncomfortable symptoms.

Kamito felt the coldness of Claire's hand stroking his cheek gently.

"...You're boiling here... Does this feel cooler?"

"Yeah..."

While placing a wet towel on Kamito's forehead, Claire straightened out the bedsheets while she was at it.

"You seem quite familiar with this. I thought young noblewomen wouldn't do this kind of stuff much."

"Nee-sama had very frail health and I looked after her when we were young. It was because Nee-sama's constitution seemed to always attract bad things for some reason."

"I see..."

A hint of gloom flashed across Claire's eyes due to recalling these past memories.

—However, it was merely for an instant. Claire immediately returned to her usual tone of voice.

"H-Hmm... Now that I've taken the effort to nurse you, this flu or whatever must go away quickly!"

"...Yeah, I'll immediately recover enough to take part in the Blade Dance selection tournament."

"Of course, because you are an important part of the team... Scarlet!"

Claire snapped her fingers to summon the hell cat spirit enveloped in flames.

"I'm going to class now. You keep Kamito warm."

"Meow～♪"

The hell cat spirit meowed adorably then jumped onto the bed, curling herself into a ball next to Kamito's chest.

"...Wow, so warm."

"I'll bring you the notes from today's lectures, so get some proper rest!"

Covering him up gently with the blanket, Claire exited the room.

Part 3

A few minutes after Kamito fell asleep...

The sword hanging on the wall suddenly glowed, then disappeared into thin air.

What appeared was a beautiful young girl with dazzling silver-white hair.

Mysterious eyes of violet. Tender and smooth skin reminiscent of milk. Enveloped in faint phosphorescence, she looked adorable, almost like a snow fairy.

The "Demon Slayer"—Terminus Est. She was apparently able to manifest her original form in the human realm at last.

"Hmm, Kami... to, where are you?"

Like a child who had just woken up, Est kept looking around the room.

...Still nude and only wearing kneesocks, she walked over to the side of the bed where Kamito was sleeping.

"...Kamito, are you sleeping?"

Just as Est was about to dive under his covers in her naked state as usual—

Scarlet poked her head out from under the blanket.

"...Hell cat spirit?"

"Meow~?"

"Hell cat spirit will share his bed too?"

"Meow~ ...Meow, meow~ meow~!"

Scarlet shook her head while shaking her body and waving her paw. Although the hell cat spirit could not speak, as fellow high-ranked spirits, they were able to convey rough ideas to each other.

"Kamito got a flu...?"

"Meow~!"

Scarlet nodded vigorously.

Est placed her hand on Kamito's forehead. He seemed to be suffering in his sleep.

"...Urgh, hmm... Est?"

Kamito opened his eyes slightly.

"You woke up?"

"Kamito, is there anything I can help?"

"Oh... I see... C-Cough... Then do you want to head over to the

students in the pharmacology department to bring back some nourishing medicine?"

"Medicine...?"

"Yeah, even though spirit magic has no effect, I think a herbalist's medicine might work... cough."

The pharmacology department was located on Areishia Spirit Academy's campus, simply in another building.

Although Est was unable to maintain human form when away from Kamito for extended durations, there should not be any problems at this sort of distance.

"—Understood. I am your sword, Kamito, your wish is my command."

Est nodded expressionlessly then exited the room.

Part 4

Thus, because of that...

Est left the Raven Class dormitory and walked over to the pharmacology department somewhere within the vast school grounds.

Although Areishia Spirit Academy was known as a school for cultivating elementalists, there were all kinds of options for graduated students. Only those with excellent talents would become spirit knights directly after graduation. The pharmacology department was a place for carrying the research of potions using spirit theories as the foundation.

When Est entered the pharmacology block...

"Hey, look look, it's the only male elementalist's sword spirit!"

"Wow, so cute♪"

Surrounding students immediately gathered around. As the Demon

King of the Night's contracted spirit, Est's popularity had already reached mascot levels in the Academy.

"Miss Spirit, here's some candy for you. I made them during practicum."

"Hey, so unfair! Me too, here's some melon bread for you, eat it quick! Eat it quick!"

"...No reason to refuse."

Accepting these gifts the whole time she was there, Est began to eat.

And it was her eating appearance that kept tugging at the heartstrings of these girls who loved cute things.

"...S-So cute♪" "I wanna take her home!" "Agreed!"

"Ah, where do you think you are touching?"

While Est raised her voice, almost about to be abducted...

"What are you doing there?"

A stern voice rang out.

Ellis, the ponytailed girl dressed in the armor of the Sylphid Knights, made her appearance.

"Oh, Captain, why are you here?"

The girls took their hands off Est.

"I came to get nourishing medicine for Rakka and Reishia who are hospitalized."

Ellis turned her gaze to Est.

"You are Kazehaya Kamito's sword spirit, are you not? What are you doing here?"

"Yes, I came to get medicine for Kamito who has a flu."

"What? A flu?"

Est told the whole story to the frowning Ellis.

"...I see now, so that is why you need to pick up medicine. How

truly admirable of you."

Ellis praised with her arms crossed before her chest.

"Hmm? Flu medicine?"

The girls were thinking with their chins resting on their hands, slightly troubled.

"No more flu medicine?"

"We could tell you a recipe for a medicinal porridge that's very effective for flu, but—"

"Right now, we happen to be out of the needed herbs."

The girls shrugged.

"Hmm, so is there any solution?"

Ellis bit her lip and spoke.

"The needed herbs have to be gathered from inside the Spirit Forest."

The girls tore out the last page from a notebook, drew simple outlines on it then handed it to Est.

"Looking at these herbs, you'll definitely understand immediately because the characteristics are obvious to the eye. The recipe for the medicinal porridge is also written here. It should be easy to make."

"Thank you very much."

Est bowed deeply.

"Will you be fine on your own? Perhaps it might be better if I went with you?"

Ellis asked.

"I often take walks in the Spirit Forest, I will be fine."

Est turned to another direction, gripped the note firmly in her hand and hurried to the Spirit Forest.

Part 5

Meanwhile...

"What lovely weather for a stroll today, Carol."

"Indeed, milady."

In the courtyard under the sun's gentle rays, Rinslet Laurenfrost was taking Fenrir out on a walk.

Instead of his combat form as a giant magic wolf, Fenrir was in his tiny fuzzy strolling mode. He looked completely like a puppy like this.

"Woof, woof."

Fenrir, who was usually more docile than Scarlet, jumped around happily. The Academy's courtyard was located near the Spirit Forest and was a place where spirits felt joy.

"Speaking of which, milady, have you heard?"

Carol stopped walking and remarked.

"About what?"

"Kamito-sama seems to be resting the whole time due to a flu."

"A flu?"

Rinslet raised one eyebrow questioningly.

"How rare for an elementalist to catch a flu or other disease."

"He was probably too tired from the mission at the mining town. I also heard he was absent for lessons today too."

"Then Claire is the one taking care of him, right?"

"Apparently. Oh, but Claire-sama should have gone out to class at this time, so Kamito-sama is alone—"

Carol reported while reading from the notebook in her hand.

What was up with this maid, how did she know all kinds of news from the Academy?

"Milady, you are worrying about Kamito-sama, aren't you? Fufu."

"I-It's not like I am worrying, I-I simply..."

Rinslet denied with her face red.

Then she suddenly remembered.

"Speaking of flu, there is apparently a folk remedy passed down the Laurenfrost family."

"A folk remedy?"

"Yes, I learned it from head maid Natalia before, but..."

Rubbing her temples, Rinslet was just about to remember when...

"Woof, woof!"

Fenrir suddenly turned to forest and barked.

"Fenrir, what's the matter there?"

Rinslet frowned and looked in the direction that Fenrir kept barking at. There was a familiar figure there, walking into the Spirit Forest.

"Isn't that Kazehaya Kamito's sword spirit?"

"What is she doing all alone over there?"

"There are many dangerous beasts and spirits in the Spirit Forest. She needs to watch out."

Rinslet quickly chased after Est who was entering the Spirit Forest.

"Miss Sword Spirit, wait. Where are you going?"

"...?"

Est stopped walking and turned to look at her.

"Oh, it's the Snack Person—"

"My name is Rinslet Laurenfrost, not Snack Person!"

Rinslet remarked in exasperation.

Whenever she cooked, she would share extra snacks with the spirits, hence all spirits in the Academy recognized her as the "Snack Person."

"Do you have something important to do in the Spirit Forest?"

"Need herbs growing in the forest."

Est took out the note from her uniform pocket and told Rinslet why she was here.

"...I see now. To heal Kamito-san's flu, herbs are necessary."

After learning the reason, Rinslet nodded and said:

"Miss Sword Spirit, I shall help you too."

"Really?"

"Yes, it goes without saying that the master will look after the servant."

"Fufu, milady, why don't you be honest and just say that you're worried about Kamito-san?"

"Y-You got the wrong idea. It is nothing like that at all."

Rinslet hammered her fists on Carol's back.

"Thank you very much, Snack Person—"

Still expressionless, Est bowed deeply.

Part 6

"Hmm, this ought to be enough moon shadow grass."

"There's also the mist rain grass and longevity grass, this is quite a lot, milady."

"Woof!"

Having stepped into the Spirit Forest, the three of them started to gather herbs as written on the note paper.

Although the necessary herbs were not rare inside the Spirit Forest and did not require much effort to pluck, they were not that easy to locate.

"What a nuisance. The longevity grass can't be found in this area at all."

"Really?"

"Hmm, looks like unless we go deeper into the forest—"

"Milady, this seems to resemble the longevity grass.

Carol grabbed a small blade of grass growing on the ground.

"Carol, that is nothing more than an ordinary weed..."

Just as Rinslet was grumbling at Carol...

"Eh? ...Kyaah!"

Suddenly, the ground bulged upwards and the roots of the grass in Carol's hand attacked.

"W-What!? Woah!?"

"...!?"

Slither slither slither.

Nearby, Rinslet and Est were instantly tied up like Carol.

"...Eeek, mmm... Milady, hurry and help me~..."

"...Nnnn, this, insolent, kyah...!"

"...This grass is trying to remove my kneesocks!?"

"...Woof?"

Watching his master moaning, Fenrir cocked his head to one side in puzzlement.

"Ah, this is no game. H-Hurry and save us..."

"Woof!"

Responding to Rinslet's shout, Fenrir ripped the grass roots with his teeth.

However, the roots instantly regenerated and tied the girls up again. If Fenrir tried to freeze them, the tied up girls would probably get caught up too.

"...Kyah, d-don't touch, n-not there...!"

Just at this moment, there was a sudden sound of trees shaking in the depths of the forest.

"Hmm? What are you girls doing in a place like this?"

"Y-You are!?"

Rinslet suddenly raised her voice and cried out.

A blonde girl emerged from the depths of the forest with a large wooden staff in her hand.

"Horin Shareilia-san of Grizzly Class?"

"Oh, isn't this Raven Class' Snack Person?"

Putting down her staff, the girl chanted a brief incantation.

Suddenly, the roots loosened in an instant, retracting back into the ground with a whoosh.

"T-Thanks..."

Finally liberated, Rinslet, Carol and Est sighed in relief.

"There are many monsters here disguised as plants. You've got to be careful."

Picking up her staff again, the girl walked over.

Instead of living in the dorms, Shareilia of Grizzly Class lived in the Spirit Forest. Even within the Academy, she was a well-known eccentric. She was also an accomplished member of Team Cernunnos, which was ranked fifth in school. A powerful controller of beast swarm spirits.

"What are you girls doing here?"

"We are looking for this herb."

Est showed the note given to her from the students at the pharmacology department.

After reading the note, the girl nodded.

"If it's this kind of herb, I happen to have some."

"Really?"

"Yeah, come into my tent."

Est, Rinslet and Carol went into the tent in the forest.

Inside a small tent made of animal skins, there was smoke drifting with an unbelievable smell. There were also lots strange looking mushrooms and jars of herbs.

"Shareilia-san, why are you living in the forest?"

"Druids are elementalists who coexist with nature. Inside the forest, I can sense the presences of spirits more."

Shareilia took out the herb from a jar and gave it to Est.

"If you cut this herb up and put it into porridge, it should heal a flu straight away."

"Thank you very much, Forest Person."

Est bowed expressionlessly then gingerly placed the herb into a bag.

"This will reassure milady too."

Carol smiled.

"Yes, then I must depart in order to prepare for next class. Let us part ways here, Miss Sword Spirit."

"Yes, thank you very much, Snack Person."

"Like I said, Snack Person is not my name! Let's go, Carol—"

"Very well, milady—"

Just as Rinslet turned around and was about to exit the tent...

Suddenly, she stopped as though she remembered something.

For some reason, she turned her gaze to the wooden staff in Shareilia's hand.

"...Milady?"

"I remember it now. The folk remedy passed down the Laurenfrost family."

Part 7

Having obtained the herbs necessary for cooking medicinal porridge, Est walked over to the vegetable garden belonging to the Academy.

Rinslet had taught her the Laurenfrost family's folk remedy for flu. In order to put this remedy into action, a certain vegetable was needed.

"—Looks like there is plenty."

Stepping into the field, Est murmured expressionlessly.

Her eyes were fixated on the tall scallions growing in one corner of the field.

"Two ought to be enough."

Just as she knelt down, trying to pull out the scallion from the field —

"W-Wait, what are you doing!?"

A frantic voice came from somewhere.

"...?"

Est looked back to see a black-haired girl, dressed entirely in ritual attire, walking towards her.

Fianna Ray Ordesia, the Empire's second princess. Recently, she had joined Kamito's team. Having accepted a mission from the Academy, she had been preparing for a kagura dance ritual as part of an offering to ensure a bountiful harvest for this field.

Panting, Fianna ran over to Est's side.

"What is the matter?"

Est paused and turned her head.

"This vegetable garden belongs to the Academy. You can't just take vegetables away without permission."

"I can't take scallions from here?"

"Not unless you ask the spirits of this land first."

Fianna shook her head and frowned.

"...Speaking of which, why must you have scallions?"

"To heal Kamito's flu."

"...For this purpose?"

Est told Fianna the folk remedy she had heard from Rinslet Laurenfrost.

"Really? A folk remedy from the Laurenfrosts. Indeed, I have heard of it. Due to being a land of extreme cold and poverty, they have many peculiar methods of staying healthy there—"

Fianna rested her chin on her hand, pondering in a dilemma.

"Although I'd like to help cure Kamito-kun of his flu too, this field belongs to the spirits. If you take scallions without permission, the spirits will be angered."

Crops of the land were produced by the blessings of spirits together with the land. Without the blessings of spirits, crops could not grow healthily.

Hence, when harvesting crops, it was necessary to make a dance offering to please the spirits. Putting them in a bad mood would not be a good idea.

"I'll offer a ritual performance and try to ask if the spirits could share some of their scallions with us. A simple scaffold needs to be put up, so I think it'll be done by evening."

"No time for that, because Kamito is suffering from fever right now."

Est shook her head expressionlessly.

"I am the Demon Slayer. I have no need to plead to spirits of the land."

"Ah, wait up—"

Before Fianna had the time to stop her, Est had already plucked the scallions out .

In that instant, the ground shook, spewing a large amount of sand and soil.

"...!?"

"Kukeeeeeeeeeeeh!"

Amidst the large amount of scattered dust, ominous figures appeared.

They were four spirits with the outer appearance of chickens.

...Exactly like chickens. They looked identical to chickens no matter how you viewed them. Except that their beaks were especially gigantic, and they had horns as well, plus even two heads each. But their oppressive presence felt as though they far surpassed other high-ranked spirits.

"Those are..."

"Those are the Four Chicken Devas, the fierce bird spirits that rule this area!"

In shock, Fianna explained in a trembling voice.

These were truly high-ranked spirits who manifested entirely in the form of animals. Without exception, these fierce bird spirits would punish and drive away all Academy students who frequently tried to steal vegetables from here.

According to rumors, the Dusk Witch had brought out scrapped

militarized spirits by her own decision when she first became headmistress, using them as protectors of the fields—

...Ultimately, there was still some truth to that rumor.

"Keh, kukehhhh!"

The fierce bird spirits raised their cockscombs and made very loud noises as though trying to threaten the scallion thief.

"F-Fierce bird spirits, please calm down!"

Fianna pleaded but to no avail.

"Kukehhh!"

Crowing, the four chickens ran towards Est.

All spirits in the Academy instinctively respected Est, the highest ranking spirit, but these chickens did not show the same behavior at all.

"Kehhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Looks like they want me to make chicken pilaf out of them."

Est remarked expressionlessly and suddenly extended her hand in the air.

Instantly, countless swords appeared in her surroundings.

"Please give me the scallions—"

Hence, the deathmatch between the Demon Slayer and the Four Chicken Devas began.

Part 8

"...Est has been gone for so long."

Still staring at the ceiling, Kamito muttered quietly in bed.

No matter how safe it was within the Academy, for her to have

taken so long, he could not help but worry.

"Scarlet, I'm sorry to ask this of you, but could you check things out?"

"Meow~?"

Scarlet poked her head out, but soon after.

Kamito heard the sound of the room door opening.

"—I am back, Kamito."

"Est..."

After seeing Est's face, Kamito finally showed an expression of relief.

"You took a long time, I was so worried... Uh, what's with your uniform!?"

Without thinking, Kamito looked away.

Est's uniform was tattered all over. Even her kneesocks had holes everywhere.

"...Don't look at the kneesocks. Kamito is such a pervert."

Est frantically covered her kneesocks that had many holes.

"S-Sorry... But what the heck happened?"

"Yes, I fought powerful spirits."

"Powerful spirits?"

"Please don't ask any further. Rather, Kamito, please have a good rest."

Est advised while walking over to the kitchen.

"...Est?"

"I will make porridge with herbs. Please wait a short while for me."

"Est, you know how to cook?"

"Of course, because I am the Demon Slayer."

"No no no, I don't think cooking has anything to do with being the Demon Slayer... C-Cough..."

"Kamito, be good and go to sleep."

"...Y-Yeah, got it... Thanks."

Despite feeling uneasy, Kamito still lay down.

Part 9

Several minutes after that...

"Ugh... Nnn..."

"...Kamito, are you okay?"

Est brought a bowl of porridge. Kamito was having nightmares in his fever.

"...Est, o-ohhh..."

"I made a bowl of porridge for you, Kamito."

"C-Cough... You're such a great help, thanks..."

Est placed the porridge on the table next to the bed.

Kamito sat up in bed.

Holding a spoon in her hand, Est stared expressionlessly at Kamito.

"...Est?"

"Please open your mouth, Kamito."

"Huh?"

Kamito was stunned for a moment.

"Please say ah~ and open your mouth, Kamito."

"No, it's okay, I can eat on my own. Can you give me the spoon?"

"No."

"B-But..."

Kamito gulped hard.

Est looked like she was in a good mood. She was really happy.

But going "ah~" was too embarrassing. Furthermore—

Bubbling. Bubbling bubbling.

The porridge was seething like lava... Eating it directly would probably scald his mouth.

"..."

"..."

Several seconds later, their gazes met.

"...F-Fine."

Kamito surrendered completely.

Fearfully, he opened his mouth with caution, taking the spoon into his mouth.

"So hot!"

Kamito reflexively jumped.

Originally on the bed, Scarlet got up and fled.

"Kamito, please don't move or else I will miss."

Saving the porridge that was almost knocked over, Est impatiently straddled Kamito on the bed.

"H-Hey...!"

"Kamito, please open your mouth now."

"HOT!"

Kamito bounced up a second time.

"...?"

"I think that porridge is a lot easier to eat if it cools down a bit..."

Est unwillingly put down the porridge.

"Phew..."

Kamito finally closed his eyes in relief, but his relief was short-lived...

Thud.

"...Woah!"

This time, Est straddled him and looked down at him.

In this manner, she began to undress with determination.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"I heard that passing warmth from skin to skin is better during a flu."

"W-Who did you hear that from...? Eh, though I can probably guess!"

Most likely, she heard it from Fianna.

(...T-That damn princess!)

"Kamito, be good and stay still—"

While continuing to undress, Est spoke expressionlessly.

Her skirt fell down, turning her completely naked.

"...Y-You'll catch my flu..."

"Spirits don't get flu."

Est suddenly brought her face up close.

"...?"

At this moment, Kamito suddenly noticed something strange and frowned.

Est was holding something long in her hand.

...A scallion. A long scallion of excellent quality.

"W-Why a scallion?"

"Kamito, show me your butt."

Scallion in hand, Est expressionlessly closed in.

"Don't... Est... STOPPPPPPPPP!"

Kamito's pitiful screams reverberated all over the Raven Class dorm.

Part 10

Claire returned to her room to visit Kamito during the lunch break.

"W-Why are all of you here?"

"N-Nothing much, just out of worry for Kamito-san!"

"It is perfectly normal for a knight to visit someone sick in bed."

"Fufu, unless I come to warm up Kamito-kun's body, well..."

The four girls met one another in front of the door. While restraining one another and opening the door...

"...Kamito?"

"...Ugh, ughhhhhhh—"

Kamito could be seen in bed, suffering from a nightmare.

"Wait, are you okay? ...But the fever seems to be completely gone."

"Why is he still having a nightmare when the fever has clearly gone down!?"

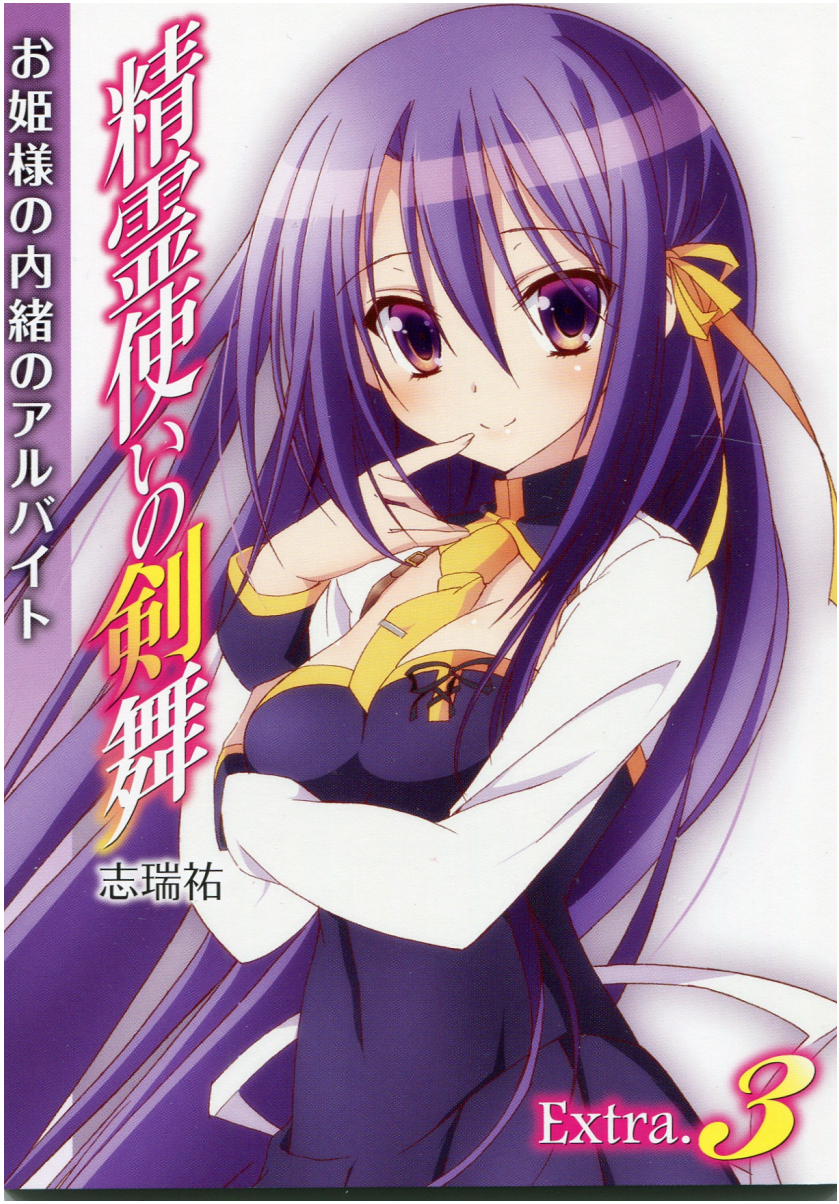
"Scallion... Scallion..."

"...Scallion?"

Everyone frowned and looked at one another.

For some unknown reason, lying on the floor next to the bed was a snapped scallion and Est upsidedown in sword form.

The Princess' Confidential Part-time Job



Part 1

This happened on a certain day a couple weeks prior to the Blade Dance festival.

After attending a free elective lecture before noon, Claire and Kamito were strolling down a corridor in the Academy when they noticed a girl standing in front of a noticeboard and stopped.

"...Hmm? Isn't that Fianna?"

"Yeah, what is she doing there, I wonder?"

Kamito and Claire exchanged glances and quietly approached her from behind.

"...This one is no good. Not this one either, hmm..."

The imperial princess was contemplating something while staring at the noticeboard with a serious look on her face.

"What are you doing, Fianna?"

"Kyah!?"

Kamito patted her on the shoulder, causing her to look back frantically, staring with her dusk-colored eyes widened.

"Kamito-kun... Oh, and Claire too."

"What do you mean, 'and'..."

Claire pouted angrily and looked at the noticeboard.

"What are you staring at so seriously?"

On the noticeboard hanging on the wall in the corridor, there were various "quests" organized according to difficulty level. Since most of these were low-ranked and safe quests commissioned by residents of the Academy town and nearby villages, there were almost no risky high-ranked quests.

Although there were some top-ranked quests about defeating superior archdemon-class spirits posted at the top of the noticeboard, these quests looked like they were reserved for senior students such as Velsaria Eva in advance.

"Are you telling me you're here to apply for a quest?"

Claire's eyebrow twitched.

"Let me make this clear first. Unless we win in the tournament, quests of this difficulty level won't be of much help in qualifying our team to compete in the Blade Dance."

"No, I'm looking at that side..."

Fianna turned her head to the side and pointed to another corner of the noticeboard.

Posted there were recruitment notices for students.

"...Part-time jobs?"

This time, it was Kamito's turn to feel puzzled.

"Fianna, why do you need to..."

Fianna was a true member of the imperial family. Based on status, she should not need to work.

Besides, in the Academy where the students were all young ladies of noble birth, it was unlikely for students to need to work part-time, but in reality, the number of part-time job offers were not few at all. This was because there were exceptions such as lower-ranked nobles who did not own vast territories or students with special circumstances like Claire.

"Eh, this is..."

Fianna looked hesitant.

"F-For money..."

She whispered, quite embarrassed.

"For money... But you still count as royalty."

"It's just an empty title. The stipend from the imperial house is no longer and I've already used up all the spirit crystals I brought."

In response to Fianna's self-deprecation, Claire and Kamito could not help but fall silent.

She was exiled by imperial family due to being the Lost Queen who had lost her power of the spirit contract. Without any wealth, her

stipend cut off, she had truly abandoned everything to come to this Academy.

—All for the sake of meeting Kamito.

"But almost none of these offers seem any good..."

Turning her gaze back to the noticeboard, Fianna sighed lightly.

"...? You used to be a Queen candidate at the Divine Ritual Institute, right? Shouldn't it be easy to find a job if you use your princess maiden qualifications?"

This was obvious. Almost all the recruitment notices here sought the powers wielded by Academy students as elementalists. Examples included ritual dancing jobs to make offerings to spirits of the earth in prayer of bountiful harvests, or jobs asking powerful spirits to chop down forests. Indeed, as someone trained at the Divine Ritual Institute, these types of jobs should be very easy for her to get the hang of.

"Look, there's a dam construction job that's hiring. If that knight spirit—"

"U-Unacceptable! Using the imperial family's spirit for construction work."

Fianna shook her head. Then she looked down slightly.

"Moreover, this time, I don't quite want to use my powers as a princess maiden."

"...? Why—"

"You should be able to understand the feeling of not wanting to attract unnecessary attention, right?"

Showing slight sadness in her dusk-colored eyes, Fianna sighed.

"...Yes, that's right... Sorry."

Claire looked away apologetically.

Persecuted as the Calamity Queen's younger sister, Claire could empathize with the feelings of Fianna, who had been mocked by the imperial palace and called the Lost Queen. Perhaps Fianna still felt resistant against being exposed to the eyes of such snobbish people

again after recovering her power as a princess maiden.

"Speaking of which, haven't you worked part-time before, Claire."

"Yes."

Claire nodded. Although she had stopped working in order to prepare for the upcoming Blade Dance, before Kamito transferred into the Academy, she had been working jobs. The vast amount of canned peaches hidden in her closet were apparently bought using her part-time wages.

"What kind of work did you do?"

"Private tutoring for children in upper-class families."

"P-Private tutoring!?"

"...Jeez, what's with your reaction?"

"Oh, nothing, rather than unexpected, it's more like..."

Kamito scratched his head hesitantly.

"I was thinking you'd surely be working as a charcoal making craftsman..."

"I was thinking charcoal craftsman too..."

"What the heck!?"

Claire's red hair stood up like flames.

"Well, oh I see... It's because your grades are so outstanding, Claire."

Just as stated, Claire's grades were surprising top-class in the Academy. Since she was born quite talented already, combined with her own serious studying.

"Fufu, private tutor huh... That's not bad too."

At this moment, Fianna murmured to herself as though in contemplation. Then...

"Fufu, Kamito-kun?"

Boing. Suddenly, Kamito felt an elastic sensation pressing on his left

arm.

"...!? W-What are you doing, Fianna!?"

"Since you're in remedial studies, Kamito-kun, let me tutor you privately♪"

"...Huh, wait, w-w-w-what are you doing, you pervert princess!"

"I am not the pervert princess but the pervert teacher♪"

"Stop changing the subject!"

Claire grumbled and entered a pose to pull Fianna away.

"What are you doing, may I ask?"

At this time, a voice called out from the other end of the corridor.

"...Rinslet?"

Kamito turned his head to see Rinslet holding a book in her hand, walking over with Carol.

"Fianna's looking for a part-time job."

"Her Highness?"

While Rinslet listened with a slight tilt of her head, Kamito explained the whole story.

"...I see now. Seeking a part-time job to not depend on a stipend, how admirably touching."

Rinslet clasped her hands before her chest and nodded.

"Rinslet, I don't suppose you've really worked, right?"

"My, I'll have you know that I am quite an expert at folding advertising flyers."

Hmph, Rinslet puffed her chest out.

"Milady has received commendations at an advertising flyer folding convention."

"Why would a daughter of the Laurenfrost family be folding flyers..."

"I discovered it was fun while I was helping Carol out in her part-time job."

"Why is a maid taking on part-time jobs..."

Without paying attention to Kamito who was questioning with narrowed eyes, Rinslet turned to Fianna.

"Your Highness, if it pleases you, would you like me to introduce to you a shop I am acquainted with?"

"...Really? That would be a great help."

"Yes, after all, that shop is always complaining about a lack of manpower. I shall try contacting them after school."

"I'm so glad for you, Fianna."

"Yes, thank you. Rin... slot-san?"

"My name is Rinslet Laurenfrost!"

Rinslet went red in the face, offended.

"Seems like a lot of fun. I'll go have a look too."

"Me too, it's worrying so I'm coming too."

Part 2

With this decided, the next day arrived. Kamito and company arrived at a certain stylish shop recommended by Rinslet, located in the busiest street in the Academy town.

"Hold on, don't tell me this place..."

Fianna whispered nervously after looking at the shop sign.

"Yes, this is the famous confectionery shop, the Royal Palace, whose main branch is located in the imperial capital."

Rinslet tossed her hair elegantly and spoke.

"...W-W-Why did it happen to be a cake shop, of all things?"

Kamito was so frightened that he was kneeling on the ground, clutching his head.

"Kamito-san, what is the matter with you?"

"A-Arghhhhh..."

(...Speaking of which, I guess Rinslet still doesn't know how terrible Fianna's cooking is.)

Kamito stood up unsteadily.

"Hey Rinslet..."

"Kyah, w-what are you doing so suddenly!?"

Just as Kamito tried to whisper in Rinslet's ear, she shuddered slightly.

"...I'm sorry, but this place won't work. Fianna can't cook at all."

"Worry not. The cake chefs here will teach you hand-over-hand even if you have no experience in making confectionery."

"No, that's not the problem here..."

"Hold on, what are you two whispering about?"

"Y-Your faces are too close!"

Claire and Fianna angrily glared at Kamito.

Then the bell rang and the shop's door opened.

"...Oh."

"Come, come, welcome to the shop, ladies."

Out from the shop walked a mature and reliable looking woman, dressed in a white chef's uniform.

She seemed to be the owner of this shop.

"I have already heard the details from Rinslet-sama. Yes, you will certainly be a great help."

"Thank you for looking after us today."

Rinslet bowed politely and introduced the woman to Kamito and the girls.

"She used to be the Grand Pâtissier at the imperial palace. She is also my teacher in confectionery making."

"Rinslet's teacher huh..."

"Calling me teacher would be too kind. Milady, you immediately surpassed me not long after you started learning—"

"My, such flattery is not needed."

Rinslet shook her head.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Grand Pâtissier."

Fianna stepped forward and curtsied politely.

Then Claire took a step forward too.

"U-Umm, is it okay... if I join in to learn?"

"You too, Claire?"

"Umm, I'd like to... learn to make sweets..."

Claire fidgeted with her fingers while speaking awkwardly:

"Also, t-the Valentia Holy Festival is coming up."

"...Ah, there is that, yes."

Fianna smiled lightly.

"S-Such a thing, what it is..."

"Hmm? Is this something to talk about it in front of Kamito-kun?"

"...~H-Haah, d-don't—"

Small sparks jumped out from the tips of Claire's hair while her face turned bright red.

The shop owner nodded generously.

"Why certainly. I won't reject you... You are the one contracted to a hell cat spirit, aren't you?"

"Y-Yes..."

"In that case, please head over to the oven to bake some cookie dough."

"Be careful and don't char the cookies."

"D-Don't worry, I know how to operate an oven at least!"

Part 3

"So, Fianna-sama, please whip this cream next—"

Inside the kitchen of the classy confectionery shop, the Royal Palace, the two girls were now dressed in aprons and being instructed by the Grand Pâtissier.

Fianna whipped the cream in the bowl until it frothed whereas Claire arranged cookie dough in the oven tray one by one. She looked fairly experienced, actually.

(...Anyway, I guess there's no problem.)

Kamito watched them from a corner in the kitchen, finally able to breathe a sigh of relief. Putting aside Claire, who still had not started using fire yet, Fianna did not seem to be doing anything weird.

(...That royal white stew last time must have been a mistake.)

It was supposed to be something created to kill Claire in the first place. Judging from the way things were going, the girls should manage to succeed with ordinary cooking.

"Jump, embers—"

After putting all cookie dough onto the tray, Claire activated the oven. The oven was an expensive model that used spirit crystals. Small salamanders were released to sustain a heated plate.

...A short while later, a very appetizing aroma drifted from the kitchen.

"...Wow, this aroma is amazing."

Suddenly, the sword at Kamito's waist glowed brightly.

Then a beautiful silver-haired girl appeared in the kitchen.

"...Est, what happened? Why now?"

"Yes, I woke up because I smelled a great aroma."

Est yawned while stretching.

"Kamito, I am hungry."

Est fidgeted and tugged Kamito's sleeve.

"Don't eat without permission. Be patient and I'll buy some for you to eat properly."

"Yes, Kamito."

Est nodded and started staring at the cookies in the oven.

A few more minutes passed...

"The cream is done♪"

Holding the bowl in both hands, Fianna happily turned towards Kamito.

"Wow, it looks properly done."

The bowl was filled with fresh cream... Anyway, it looked fine judging from appearance alone.

"Fufu, Kamito-kun, would you like to have a taste? It is as soft as my bosom."

Boing.

"...Fianna!?"

"Well then, let's try the taste—"

The shop owner cleared her throat and took the bowl.

Putting a spoonful of the cream in her mouth, she then—

...Froze, just like that.

"...?'

Kamito used his finger to sample a bit of the cream too.

"H-How is it? Kamito-kun..."

"N-No taste..."

...It was like eating fluffy air. What an unbelievable taste.

"...Your Highness, how on earth did you make this?"

"How...? I simply prayed for it to become delicious while stirring normally, that's all, I guess?"

Fianna explained with a troubled expression.

(...Don't tell me that Fianna's prayers even have the effect of altering flavors?)

Talented as an elite princess maiden, if she infused her thoughts into her cooking, perhaps there would be an effect like ritual magic, thus altering the taste.

"Hmm, this is slightly impossible to use..."

The shop owner remarked quietly with a solemn expression, but just at that moment...

"...Haah!"

A scream came from behind.

"What happened, Claire!?" "What's wrong?"

Just as Kamito and the others turned around...

"T-The fire spirit in the oven suddenly... Hey you, stop this right now!"

Inside the huge oven, countless salamanders were gorging themselves on the cookies.

"Claire, what did you do!?"

"B-Because it wasn't hot enough, so I just... added a bit more power... Uwah!"

With slithering tongues, the tiny salamanders ate all the cookies on the tray. Then they opened the oven's door and ran outside.

"H-Hold it..."

The countless fire spirits began to stuff themselves with their favorite cakes in the shop without restraint.

"Leave it to me. Fenrir!"

Rinslet swiftly raised her hand and summoned a gigantic white wolf.

"Woof!"

"Freeze all of those fire spirits!"

"H-Hold on, Rinslet—"

Kamito frantically called to stop her, but it was already too late...

Fenrir opened his jaws wide and discharged a fierce blizzard at the fire spirits running amok all over the place.

The fire spirits were instantly frozen. Turning into particles of light, they vanished into thin air.

"Phew~ That probably does the trick... Oh dear?"

"...Ahhhhh, all the cakes today are ruined...!"

Inside the kitchen that was frozen in ice, the shop owner collapsed in shock.

Part 4

...As a result, part-timing at the Royal Palace had to be suspended.

Since the owner fainted from shock, Rinslet and the remaining staff were currently rushing to make cakes desperately.

Feeling responsible, Claire bought all of the ruined cakes.

"...Sigh, am I unable to make anything other than charcoal?"

Claire was walking in the Academy town in depression. Her lively twintails also seemed wilted. Her mood was in the pits.

"Well, this does happen sometimes. Didn't I waste the cream too?"

Fianna patted her on the shoulder, trying to cheer Claire up.

"Ooh, Fianna... I never knew you were such a good person..."

"...There, there, don't cry. But what shall we do next...?"

"Well, let's look around patiently. We'll find something."

Kamito said. Then at this time...

"If it pleases you, would you like me to introduce you to the shop where I work?"

"...Carol, when did you arrive!?"

Carol suddenly appeared in front of Kamito's group while they were walking.

"Maids can appear any time, no matter where."

Carol smiled.

"Don't you have to stay with Rinslet?"

"Hmm, I can't help out much anyway."

"So direct..."

Kamito narrowed his eyes to ask then sighed lightly.

"By the way, what shop do you work at, Carol?"

Claire frowned and asked.

"A cafe in the Academy town. As a waitress."

"Your job should be Rinslet's maid, right?"

"Just a side job and milady gave permission."

"Rather, I'd really like to become a Laurenfrost maid."

Fianna murmured quietly.

"But being a waitress seems quite fun."

"...Right. If it's just serving customers outside the kitchen, there shouldn't be a problem, right?"

"Great, Carol, could you introduce us?"

"Yes, leave it to me!"

Part 5

The shop Carol recommended was a grand cafe named Annerose, located in the center of the Academy town.

Since the four of them looked respectable to begin with, plus Carol's recommendation, all of them were hired after a simple interview.

"Fufu, this is truly quite a cute uniform♪"

When Fianna twirled around, her uniform's skirt fluttered lightly.

"...But why, even me..."

Claire looked down at her tiny chest and murmured. Since the Annerose uniform featured low necklines, this outfit made the size of her chest even more apparent.

"How do you intend to pay for the wasted cakes?"

"W-Well..."

Claire was at a loss for words. Then...

"...I'm the most tragic here."

Entering the hall with a face of despair was...

Kamito in a waitress uniform.

"K-Kamito!?" "Dear me, Kamito-kun, this really does suit you..."

"Gah..."

Kamito bellowed unhappily.

In any case, things had developed to this point. Kamito's original intention was to do dish washing and the like in the kitchen, so he accepted the interview, but for some reason, the shop owner immediately handed him a waitress uniform upon seeing him.

"Umm, Kamito... You're so... pretty."

"That doesn't make me feel any better."

Kamito groaned.

"Look, Kamito-kun..."

Fianna smiled lightly and approached him, then...

"Your collar is a mess."

Standing on tiptoe, Fianna brought Kamito's ribbon together and tied it up.

"S-Sorry..."

"Hold on, what are you doing? You pervert princess!"

Claire angrily raised her voice in objection.

"Kamito, does this look good?"

Then a tiny voice came from behind this time.

Dressed in uniform, Est expressionlessly stood in front of the counter.

"Y-Yeah..."

"The socks are too short... I feel so embarrassed..."

Pushing her skirt down, Est awkwardly covered her thighs. Instead of her usual kneesocks, she was wearing shorter knee-high socks.

Since the owner liked Est too, Est was also working here.

"...It looks really great on you."

"So happy, Kamito."

"...Muuu~, you spoil Est too much."

"Indeed..."

Fianna concurred with the pouting Claire.

"It's about time everyone, get to work!"

Carol clapped her hands and entered the hall with the owner.

"Wow, everyone looks great in these uniforms. Since Carol recommended you, I can leave the work to you without worrying!"

"Looks like Carol actually works quite seriously here."

"Yes, how unexpected..."

Kamito commented quietly and Claire nodded her head lightly.

"Please watch your behavior, you two."

Kamito and Claire could not help but straighten their backs in front of the smiling Carol.

Part 6

A while after Kamito and company started working at the cafe...

"S-Should be fine, right?"

In front of the cafe Annerose, a disturbing figure appeared.

She was wearing a feathered hat and a fluffy wrap while her face was obscured by a pair of super large sunglasses. She was peering inside through the window. The blonde hair visible under her hat was swaying lightly.

Of course, this was Rinslet.

Using her power as the cake expert, it only took her an hour or so to finish all the cakes. Putting on a disguise, she secretly came over to check out how Claire and the others were doing.

Just as she was staring at the shop like a weirdo...

"What are you doing?"

A voice suddenly came from behind. Frightened, Rinslet's entire body shook.

"...I-It is not like it's because I am worrying about Claire... Huh—"

Rinslet looked back and was suddenly speechless for a moment.

Standing was a girl whom she was acquainted with.

"...Captain!?"

Ellis Fahrengart. The captain of the Sylphid Knights who upheld public discipline in the Academy.

She looked like she was on patrol with a sword at her waist.

Ellis frowned and shifted her gaze into the cafe.

Then she noticed familiar faces inside.

"...What, the princess is working here?"

She murmured with a solemn expression.

"Although the Academy does not prohibit working part-time, b-but is that uniform not excessively shameless?"

Ellis thought slightly for a moment.

"Hmm, this calls for an investigation."

Nodding firmly, she stepped into the cafe.

"Oh, Captain..."

Rinslet chased Ellis into the shop.

Part 7

"...Hmm? Those girls, are they Ellis... and Rinslet?"

In the hall serving drinks, Kamito saw them entering the cafe and raised his eyebrows.

Putting aside Ellis, Rinslet's tastes were truly weird. Although she had disguised herself with a hat and sunglasses, her true identity was already fully exposed.

(...Could it be that she came to look because she's worried about Claire?)

Kamito walked over to the two girls near the entrance and called to them.

"Ellis, Rinslet, what the heck are you doing?"

"...Hmm? Why do you know my name?" "H-How do you know my real identity—?"

The two girls responded at the same time.

Kamito shrugged and whispered quietly so that only the two girls could hear.

"...It's me."

"Kamito?" "...Kamito-san!?"

They widened their eyes and stared at Kamito's face intently.

Then finally, they realized that this waitress seemed to be Kamito.

"T-That getup, what on earth is going on!?"

"I-I never knew you had such a hobby!?"

"...Y-You're totally wrong!"

Kamito suddenly yelled in panic, causing the surrounding customers to look to see what was happening.

"No, well, it's because of special circumstances..."

Cough. Kamito cleared his throat and explained the whole story to Rinslet and Ellis.

"...I see. Now that is truly unfortunate."

"And I was wondering whether you crossdressed regularly."

"All that happened three year ago..."

"Three years ago?"

Ellis looked in surprise at Kamito who had an accidental slip of the tongue.

"...Oh, nothing... By the way, Rinslet, are thing okay on the cake side?"

Kamito hastily changed the subject.

"Fufu, of course. I made up for the ruined cakes properly."

Rinslet puffed out her chest proudly.

"I came to see whether or not Claire is working properly."

She looked at Claire who was working in the hall.

"You would like the beef stew set with omelet rice, the customer on the far side would like a seafood curry whereas the two on the side would like the bread and coffee set and the black tea and cake set respectively, no milk for either of you—"

Claire moved back and forth between the kitchen and the hall in a dazzling sight.

"She remembers clearly just from listening once..."

"Her grades really are excellent in school."

Rinslet commented proudly for some reason.

"Wow, this girl is so cute♪"

Shrill voices could be heard from the depths of the cafe at this moment.

"Here you go!" "This one too, this one～" "Here, say ah～♪"

Dressed in a waitress uniform, Est was being fed by customers.

"What is Est doing..."

"Come, say ah～ Yes, I'd really like to feed her more. Please, another order of cream puffs♪"

"One order of cream puffs, coming right up."

Taking orders on the side was the smiling Carol.

Kamito smiled wryly then looked at Fianna who was working in another corner of the hall.

"Eh, one order of orange bread and a cup of black tea, is it?"

"Wrong, I ordered milk tea."

"I-I am terribly sorry..."

Despite stammering a bit, Fianna looked like she was putting in a lot of effort. None of the customers probably recognized her face as the Second Princess.

(This job should be fine, I guess.)

Just as Kamito breathed a sigh of relief...

"Oh my, isn't this Her Highness the former Second Princess—"

"...!?"

Due to this sudden voice, Fianna was startled and stopped walking.

The one who spoke was a fancily dressed elderly aristocrat sitting on the far end of a table.

"Oh right, instead of the Second Princess, I should address you as Lost Queen, shouldn't I?"

The cafe suddenly fell silent because of the mockery in the elderly aristocrat's tone.

"...Who is that?"

"That would be Count Rondo."

"He is a high-ranked noble serving as the Minister of Finance in the imperial capital. He is probably inspecting the Academy town."

"A noble from the imperial court huh..."

Kamito clicked his tongue in his mind. Called the Lost Queen in the past, Fianna had been hurt by secret rumors among the nobles at the palace slandering her. Precisely because of that, Fianna had closed off her heart, deciding not to care about everything around her. For the past four years, she had shut herself away in the palace without going out.

"Seriously, how far you have fallen. To think that the princess who showed so much promise as a Queen candidate would be serving others in this kind of place—"

Fianna stood there frozen with her face pale. Her shoulders shook slightly and her breathing had quickened. These cruel words were tearing deeply into the scars formed in her heart when living as a recluse at the palace.

"Fianna—"

Just as Kamito was about to rush over to Fianna, Rinslet grabbed his arm.

"...Kamito-san, do not worry."

"Huh?"

And just at this moment...

"Here's your red tea—"

In front of the count, a teacup filled with black tea was brusquely placed on the table.

This cup of black tea was boiling and bubbling like lava.

"What the devil is this!?"

"Drink this now and get lost. Or else I'll turn you into charcoal."

"...!"

Since Claire was exuding anger from her entire body, the count involuntarily gulped.

"H-Hmph, like anyone needs to visit this kind of shop twice..."

After saying such dialogue in resignation, he hurried to settle his bill on the table and ran out of the cafe in panic.

"...Claire?"

No longer stunned at last, Fianna turned and stared at Claire.

Claire averted eye contact in embarrassment.

"H-Hmph, don't get the wrong idea. I simply hate guys like that—"

As though nothing had happened, Claire returned to her post.

Part 8

After completing their work at Annerose peacefully, on the way back to the dorms...

Kamito and company were walking on a stone-paved path under the moonlight.

"Fianna, why don't you treat me something with your wages?"

"Didn't you receive a wage too, Claire?"

"M-My wages were all spent on paying for those cakes..."

"Oh, that's right..."

Fianna smiled wryly at Claire who was hanging her head in depression.

"Fianna, you look quite happy."

"Fufu, is that so?"

Fianna looked back, her expression was—

Compared to her mischievous smiles in the past, it was purely an innocent smile.

Just as Kamito could not help but stare at her in mesmerization...

"...Back then, I really was very scared."

Fianna murmured.

"...Very scared?"

Kamito and Claire both responded at the same time.

Fianna nodded firmly.

"...Yes. Truth be told, when I initially made the decision to work outside, although it was partially for money, I was also trying to bid farewell to my past self who kept hiding in the palace, escaping from reality—"

Fianna stared into the distance while she spoke.

"...I see."

In front of Kamito and the others, Fianna always acted cheerful and wise.

But in fact, she was a delicate girl who was easily hurt. Hence, when she abandoned everything to run away from the palace to come to the Academy, she probably sealed all those various memories at the bottom of her heart.

"But don't worry, because I am no longer alone..."

"Fianna..."

Fianna wiped her tears away then showed a usual impish smile on her face.

"I will treat you two tonight. Where should we eat?"

"Really? How about—"

Claire stopped and turned around.

"I don't really care, but Rinslet, your disguise failed a long time ago."

"N-Not at all, it's not like I am following you!"

Originally hiding behind a pillar, Rinslet appeared.

"Whatever, just come with us. Fianna says she'll treat us."

"Yes, I am fine with that."

"...I-If you say so, then I-I shall accompany you all♪"

Taking off her sunglasses and the weird hat, Rinslet ran over in elation.

Then the sword hanging at Kamito's waist glowed.

"...Kamito, I woke up too."

"...Est, weren't people feeding you just now? You can still eat!?"

Surrounded by her friends, Fianna then...

"I am no longer alone..."

In a voice too quiet for anyone to hear, she secretly whispered to herself.

Hunting the Legendary Giant Bust Spirit!

Part 1

It was the hour of dusk when the Academy's gates were closed and the sun had set.

Inside a room at the Raven Class dorm, the aroma of stew wafted in the air.

"Fufu, I am quite confident in this stew I made for tonight."

"I can't wait, milady♪"

This was Rinslet's room on the second floor of the dorm. Dressed in an apron, Rinslet was humming a melody while preparing stew for the evening. Meanwhile, Carol was setting the table.

This full pot of beef stew was clearly more than the two of them could finish on their own. Their intention was to share with the occupants of Claire's room in the same dorm.

"However, I think Kamito-san prefers a lighter flavor, doesn't he?"

Tasting the stew, Rinslet murmured to herself.

"As long as it's made by you, milady, it'll be tasty no matter what♪"

"Seriously, Carol, your opinion is useless as a reference."

Just as Rinslet sighed, in that very moment—

"M-M-Milady!"

Carol suddenly screamed.

"What is it!?"

Rinslet instantly turned to face the room—

A giant black shadow was pressed against the outside of the window, looking into the room.

"...Tsk, a suspicious knave!"

Saying that, Rinslet chanted spirit magic and shot a blade of ice from her hand.

The blade broke the window glass and was about to make a direct hit on the shadow outside the window—

"Vanished!?"

"M-Milady—Kyah!"

"Carol!"

The figure had somehow crept behind Carol after disappearing suddenly.

"...Tsk, Fenrir!"

Simultaneous with Rinslet's summon, a white wolf appeared out of thin air, cloaked in a howling blizzard.

Without needing orders, Fenrir pounced on the figure.

Instantly, the shadow released Carol and ducked down, dodging Fenrir's slashing claws, then changed targets to rush at Rinslet.

(—To think that Fenrir's attack was dodged!?)

She reacted with a swift push of her palm, releasing spirit magic—but was half a second too late.

The shadow silently moved along the floor and snared the tip of Rinslet's foot.

"Guh... W-What are you doing...? Huahhhhhhh!!"

"Milady!"

Moving along her leg, the eerie shadow entangled her body.

Feeling like her entire body was getting groped, Rinslet fell into panic.

At this moment, the room's door was violently flung open.

"What happened!?" "What's going on, Rinslet!?"

Hearing the commotion, Kamito and Claire burst into the room side by side.

"...You two... It is, dangerous here...!"

Constricted by the shadow, Rinslet panted.

However the shadow left Rinslet—

And entered a stance as though glaring at the two newcomers.

"What is this thing!?" "Wait, it looks very dangerous!"

As Kamito drew the Demon Slayer, Claire warned.

The shadow paused momentarily then vanished with a whoosh as though melding into the air.

"...W-What was that thing?"

Claire asked with her head tilted in puzzlement.

"Are you okay, Rinslet?"

Kamito ran over to Rinslet who was collapsed on the floor.

"Y-Yes... I suppose I am fine..."

Rinslet shuddered and stood up.

She looked unharmed in appearance—

"...M-Milady!"

However, Carol screamed with her face all pale.

Rinslet looked puzzled when suddenly, Claire pointed straight at Rinslet.

"Rinslet, y-y-your..."

"My what? What is the matter?"

"Your ch-chest..."

"...Chest?"

Still with her eyebrows raised in puzzlement, Rinslet looked down at her own chest.

...Then she noticed.

"W-W-W-What... What is the meaning of this...!?"

She noticed the fact that her bust had become as flat as a board.

Part 2

"I see, so you too—"

"Us too?"

Confronted with Ellis' mysterious demeanor, the trio of Kamito, Claire and Rinslet responded with a questioning look.

—After the earlier incident, Kamito and Claire had taken the stunned Rinslet to Ellis' room at the Weasel Class dorm. After all, ordinary students were obliged to report all incidents to the Sylphid Knights if anything happened in the Academy.

Ellis sighed and took out a file from a bookshelf in her room. She opened the cover, revealing the names of several students recorded there.

"...This is?"

"A list of student victims who had suffered the same fate over the past few weeks."

"Suffered the same fate... Could it be that spirit?"

Responding to Claire's surprise, Ellis nodded firmly.

"Indeed. Scattory Rin of Owl Class, Alca Siena of Grizzly Class, followed by Resta Maia of Weasel Class. All of them had their *bosoms stolen* by that spirit."

"...!"

Kamito, Claire and Rinslet exchanged looks with one another.

"A spirit that steals bosoms, are you telling me that such a being exists..."

Rinslet murmured quietly while staring at her chest with a mournful expression. Previously buxom, her chest was now as flat as the cutting board she used regularly in the kitchen.

"Wait, why were we kept in the dark when something like this is happening!?"

"Oh, the Knights decided not to publicize this incident—"

"Why!?"

"Because the victims pleaded so. No one wants others to know that they had lost their bosom. Right now, they are using pads to get through their days in the Academy."

"...I can sympathize."

"On the other hand, I'm not quite satisfied..."

Looking at her chest that was plenty pitiful even without a spirit's theft, Claire bit her lip hard.

"Then are there any clues to the culprit's identity?"

"Yes, it is probably..."

Ellis whispered with a mysterious look.

"—The legendary giant bust spirit."

"The legendary—" "Giant bust—" "Spirit—"

The trio gulped.

"I believed it to be merely a legend, who would have thought—"

"Claire, you've heard of it?"

Kamito instantly turned to her and asked. Claire nodded.

"Yes. Rumors of it has been circulating in the Academy earlier. The spirit absorbs busts from many girls, transferring it to its contractor. I've searched for it many times in the forest before."

"I can't believe you've done something so lame for real..."

"Sh-Shut up... But in the end, I never saw any legendary giant bust spirit. Dismissing it as just a legend, I soon forgot about it..."

"—But the giant bust spirit definitely exists."

Ellis said seriously.

"Since there is a spirit that steals other people's bosoms, there is no choice but to reconsider the existence of the giant bust spirit."

"...I've never even heard of such a surreal spirit."

Kamito quipped quietly.

"So, are the Knights going to just ignore this?"

"Recently, there have been plans to assemble a strike force to take down that giant bust spirit, but well—"

Faced with Claire's questioning, Ellis answered in embarrassment.

"The Sylphid Knights lost substantial manpower during the assault incident several days earlier. Also, even though these girls were attacked, their bosoms merely shrank, so it is not like it is that serious—"

"That is neither here nor there!"

Rinslet slammed the table hard.

"I-Is that so? The likes of a heavy bosom, I have always found it quite burdensome—"

"~W-What, that's such a burden of luxury!!"

Claire protested tearfully.

"Very well, I shall go alone to exterminate that so-called giant bust spirit."

Rinslet stood up in a huff and walked to the door.

"Wait up, it's too dangerous to enter the depths of the Spirit Forest alone!"

"What was stolen must be taken back. This is a precept of the Laurenfrost family."

"Wait up, Rinslet, I'm asking you to wait!"

Claire tried to call back Rinslet who had stepped into the corridor.

"Stopping me is futile, Claire Rouge."

"I'm not stopping you. I just want to go with you."

"This is a personal matter of my own."

"I-It's not like I'm worried about you, but I'm just curious about this legendary giant bust spirit."

Claire turned her gaze away shyly.

"...Hmph. Make sure you do not get in my way."

"I'll help too."

Kamito walked over to the two of them.

"Even Kamito-san too..."

"I'm a guy so there's no worry of getting attacked by the giant bust spirit. The same goes for Claire, there's nothing to steal, so we're indispensable comrades for taking down the giant bust spirit."

"Well said... Wait, what did you say!? Are you looking for a death sentence!?"

"...Mistake! That was a mistake! The whip! Put the whip away first!"

Part 3

—Half an hour later, the trio finished their preparations for forest adventuring and entered the Spirit Forest.

The depths of the Spirit Forest was a dark and terrifying place. Every year, there were rumors of students getting lost and going missing here.

Holding a torch, Claire walked in the front.

"Come to think of it, there was one time when I entered the Abyssal Forest with Claire and even got lost."

"...S-Something like that happened?"

"Claire hugged me tightly and broke into tears."

"...Sh-Shut up! It's way back in the past!

Claire went bright red and yelled.

"But by the way, is this really the right direction?"

While staying vigilant, Kamito asked.

"Sightings of the giant bust spirit were essentially concentrated on the north side of the forest. Also, the spirit that stole Rinslet's bosom also fled in this direction—"

"Sightings are not that reliable, right? It's not like we can rule out the possibility that they were imagining things."

"It's not like we have other options. This is all we can do. Then—"

Claire turned around and looked at Rinslet's *swaying* bosom.

"A bit of a trap here..."

"Will something like that really bait the spirit?"

Rinslet looked skeptical. Her chest was even bigger than before it had been absorbed. Naturally, this was not her real bust.

Obtained by Claire, these were the fake breasts that Fianna kept hidden in her desk.

"Don't worry. These pads are on a completely different level compared to the ones sold in ordinary shops."

The princess' fake breasts were a type of enchanted artifact, a masterpiece of spirit engineering. With the power of a water spirit sealed inside them, these pads were the best choice for simulating the real thing. Even when examined up close, it looked no different from a real bosom. Using these fake breasts as bait, that giant bust spirit would surely appear. That was the plan that Claire had devised.

"This is definitely well-made..."

Squeezing her fake breasts, Rinslet murmured quietly with unease.

...By the time they realized they were lost, it was already several hours later.

Part 4

Kamito, Claire and Rinslet kept going in circles inside the forest.

Walking around in the Spirit Forest late at night was very dangerous even for experienced elementalists. Once lost, it was very difficult to find one's way back.

"...This isn't the time to be looking for that giant bust spirit."

"Yes, let us wait until dawn, get out and come back prepared."

Walking in this kind of darkness would only be a futile waste of energy. The three of of them took a break by the side of a large lake in the depths of the forest with the intention of waiting for dawn.

Since lighting a fire could attract nearby spirits, all they could eat were canned peaches.

"Why only canned peaches..." "I am shivering with cold."

"Sh-Shut up! You're not eating anything if you two complain anymore!"

With her mouth stuffed with peaches, Claire snarled back.

After eating, Claire slowly stood up and walked towards the lake.

"...Where are you going?"

"Ritual purification. If we run into the giant bust spirit, I have to confront it while fully prepared."

"I shall join you."

"Okay. Then I'll guard from here."

Kamito picked up the Demon Slayer with both hands and crouched behind some trees.

"Got that, Kamito? I'll turn you into charcoal if you peep～"

"...I got it, okay?"

"He is guarding to avoid peeping, right?"

"What was that?"

"Nothing..."

Part 5

...Splash. The sound of water was heard in the quiet forest.

With their uniforms hanging on branches, the two girls were in their underwear.

"In the end, they must have made a mistake about the giant bust spirit being in this vicinity..."

Having removed her fake breasts, Rinslet looked at her pitifully flat chest and sighed.

However, Claire shook her head.

"No, the giant bust spirit must be around. We have to catch it for sure!"

Claire clenched both fists and declared firmly, gazing at the sky.

Rinslet cocked her head in puzzlement.

"...Why are you so fired up to do something for my sake?"

"Huh?"

"Because it is not like it was your bosom that was stolen—"

She looked at Claire's chest.

"If the people around you got flatter, doesn't that make your chest relatively bigger?"

"Even if I become relatively bigger, that doesn't mean much."

Claire shrugged then bent down slightly—

"If we catch the spirit of big busts, even I might get slightly bigger... Also, it counts as returning your favor."

"My favor?"

"It's in the past, though you probably forgot it—"

With her legs submerged in the lake water, Claire thought back to

that day three years ago.

Part 6

—Three years ago, at the Eluore Prep School.

"Haha! This fire will be put out if we pour water on it, right?"

Some upper-year girls were crouching on the ground, using a stick to poke a salamander spirit.

This spirit was very weak and its flames felt like they were going to disappear any moment.

"Stop that! Do not bully Mr. Spirit!"

Claire tackled the girl who was holding the stick.

"Ah—"

The salamander spirit took this opportunity to jump into the bushes and escaped.

"What is this, the Calamity Queen's little sister. Got a problem with that? Huh?"

The senior students surrounded Claire, looking down at her and even started to get physical.

"Ouch, stop it...!"

"Look at her, so full of herself—"

One girl grabbed Claire's ribbon and pulled it up violently.

At that very moment—

Raging wind mixed with ice began to blow around the senior students who were bullying Claire.

"W-What?"

"Hmph, don't you know that bullying the weak would completely

tarnish an elementalist's honor?"

Elegantly tossing her voluminous blonde hair, Rinslet appeared. Fenrir's spirit seal on her right hand was glowing.

"Tsk, this is not good. That girl's..." "Hold on, from the Laurenfrost family?"

The senior students fled immediately after seeing Rinslet's face. The Laurenfrost family's mighty reputation and Rinslet's own power were widely known throughout the school. Naturally, no one was stupid enough to make enemies of this young lady.

Rinslet shrugged and looked at Claire.

"You too, seriously. You look nothing like an Elstein daughter at all."

"The name of Elstein exists no longer."

Claire turned her face away.

"Really?"

"Huh?"

"But I know this."

Staring straight into Claire's eyes while she was looking up, Rinslet smiled fearlessly.

"Inside your heart resides the flames of Elstein—"

Part 7

"It became bigger, though only just a little..."

Rinslet's voice interrupted Claire's flashback.

"...N-Nothing of that sort!"

Claire wrapped her arms around herself and hid her chest.

"Did you use the bust-enhancing technique I taught you—"

"I tried it out but it didn't work at all!!"

Claire pouted and glared at Rinslet.

"Are you going to use the fraudulent technique you taught me?"

Rinslet shrugged and looked down at her own chest.

"At this rate if we still fail to catch the giant bust spirit, I might very well have to rely on this bust-enhancing technique..."

While whispering mournfully, Rinslet massaged her own chest.

"Wrong, you need to do it like this... Mmm♪"

As though modeling as an example, Claire tried massaging her own chest.

"L-like this... Kyah♪"

"...Mm, hyah♪"

Part 8

(...I-I can hear everything from here, jeez.)

Sitting in a tree's shadow, Kamito muttered in his heart.

At that moment, he sensed a presence in the scattering wind.

"...Huh, what's that? Could it be the giant bust spirit?"

Holding the Demon Slayer, Kamito rushed into the depths of the darkness.

"Claire! Rinslet!"

Brushing the bushes apart, he heard shrill voices—

"K-Kamito-san!?" "Hwahhhh, w-what are you looking at, Kamito!?"

Blushing intensely, the two girls screamed.

"...S-Sorry...!"

As Kamito turned his face away, he was greeted with water splashing at him.

"Y-You pervert!" "Kamito-san is so dirty!"

Claire hugged Scarlet to guard her chest.

Meanwhile, Rinslet had put on her fake breasts at some point to hide her real chest.

"...Y-You got me wrong! I sensed something—"

Just as the two girls were raising their eyebrows—

"Rinslet, behind you!"

Kamito cried out. The shadow suddenly appeared behind Rinslet.

"...Th-The giant bust spirit!?"

The shadow nimbly entangled Rinslet from behind and rubbed her chest.

"...Gasp... Ah, kyah♪"

"Bastard, release Rinslet!"

Claire summoned Flametongue, wrapping it around the shadow's neck.

The shadow cried out in anguish and fled into the depths of the forest.

"Chase it down, Kamito!"

"Yeah!"

Part 9

The creepy shadow was weaving through the trees.

Its escaping speed was quite fast. Most likely, it had memorized the forest's geography well.

"Fenrir, catch that thing!"

Fenrir roared and slashed with his claws, shattering the trees in his path.

However, the shadow slid through gaps in the attacks as though performing acrobatics, escaping through the bushes.

"Not bad for a mere giant bust spirit. However—"

Claire unleashed Flametongue, sweeping the bushes horizontally.

The bushes were instantly incinerated, exposing the figure of the hiding giant bust spirit.

"Over there!"

Claire swung her whip. Tracing out a red trail, the flames ensnared the jumping shadow.

"Captured!"

"Well done—" "Nice job, Claire!"

Kamito and Rinslet instantly caught up and surrounded the giant bust spirit.

Even when entangled by the whip, the shadow continued to struggle relentlessly.

"Listen here, giant bust spirit, time to give up—"

Suddenly, a gigantic object appeared over the trio's heads.

"...!?"

The trio looked up, only to see...

"W-What!?" "What the heck!?"

A humongous breast had appeared.

A breast. Quivering, wobbling, and translucent, the giant breast was

hovering in the night sky.

...More than surreal, this scene was absolutely stupid.

"...W-What the heck is this?"

"E-Even if you ask me... Maybe a breast monster?"

Staring blankly at the sky, Claire did not try to hide her confusion. The flying giant breast was accompanied by spinning shadows like the one that had attacked Rinslet.

"What a surprise. Is that the main body of the giant bust spirit?"

Just as Kamito spoke, in that instant...

The giant breast flying in the air, its entire body(?) shuddered with a boing♪

"Incoming!"

Claire warned the group. At the same time, the shadows surrounding the giant breast attacked them.

"Turn into charcoal!"

The flaming whip slashed through the air, slicing shadows apart. However, out from the bifurcated shadows sprouted slender tentacles to envelop Claire.

"...Hyah!"

"Claire! You bastard—!"

Kamito instantly slashed the shadows with his sword. Sliced by the Demon Slayer, the shadows literally vanished as a puff of smoke in the air.

"Kamito, th-thanks..."

"Don't lower your guard. Despite looking like that, its probably quite a high-ranked spirit—"

"Claire, your chest—is your chest okay!?"

"Yes, I am fine..."

Claire looked down at her chest and smiled fearlessly.

"As suspected, my chest is already too small to be absorbed..."

"That's sad in its own way..."

"Shut up... Let's go, scorching ball of conflagration!"

As though venting her anger, Claire released a Fireball at the main body of the giant bust spirit.

Explosion. Hovering in midair, the translucent giant breast was engulfed by blazing flames.

"I did it!"

"—No, it is not over yet!"

Rinslet cried out.

At the same time, the unscathed giant breast's quivering form appeared from the dissipating storm of the explosion.

"No way! It was a direct hit from a Fireball!"

"It must have the power to neutralize a flat chest's attack!"

"What is with this thing... And what the heck are you talking about!?"

Just as Claire griped, the giant bust spirit grew even bigger and smashed down from above.

"Kyahhhh!"

Directly underneath, Claire was struck squarely.

"Claire!" "Watch out, Rinslet!"

Kamito caught Rinslet's arm and pulled her from under there.

The giant bust spirit bounced with a boing♪ and flew into the sky again.

"How dare you do that to Claire... Freezing fangs of ice, go forth and pierce—Freezing Arrow!"

Rinslet swiftly fired an arrow of ice.

However, the arrow bounced off the giant breast completely.

"Even ice is not working!?"

"Rinslet, below you!"

Hearing Kamito's warning, Rinslet looked down. Without them noticing, one of the spirit's shadows was hiding underfoot, trying to climb towards Rinslet's chest.

"...Kyahhhh!"

"—Calm down, *abandon the breasts*!"

"...!"

Listening to Kamito, Rinslet grabbed the fake breasts and tossed them away.

Crafted using a water spirit's power, the pads bounced elastically on the forest floor.

Perhaps due to the traits of the giant bust spirit, the shadow entangling Rinslet instantly released her and went to chase the pads.

"Hoo, what a life steeped in sin—"

Rinslet fired another arrow of ice at the sky.

Naturally, she knew it would be ineffective against the giant bust spirit. She was aiming somwhere else.

"Kamito-san, now!"

"Yeah—!"

The trails of countless arrows formed a network in the air like a spider's web woven between the trees. On top of that web, Kamito sprinted.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Kamito swung the Demon Slayer.

Part 10

"Now you are captured, giant bust spirit!"

"Give up all resistance, you enemy of young maidens!"

Standing arms akimbo, Rinslet and Claire looked down at the giant bust spirit at their feet.

Kamito had not cut down the giant bust spirit directly. There was no guarantee that killing it would return the stolen bosoms. It was totally possible that the girls' breasts would not return had they attacked without thinking.

Tied up securely by Claire's whip, the giant bust spirit wobbled and struggled like mad, looking like a large slab of boneless ham. It was quite surreal.

"Looks like it's begging for mercy..."

"Hmm, if you don't want to turn to charcoal, hurry up and return everyone's breasts—"

—At that very moment...

'O little lady...'

"...Huh?"

Hearing the voice echoing in the forest, Claire entered a stance swiftly.

'O little lady, wouldst thou... wouldst thou wish for a bosom?

"...Wh...at, this thing, this thing just spoke!"

Claire stared wide-eyed in surprise. The source of the voice could very well be the slab of boneless ham—no, the giant bust spirit—at her feet.

"But this thing keeps wobbling!"

"How disgusting..."

The two girls reflexively recoiled away from the giant bust spirit

and hid behind Kamito's back.

'Answer me—Dost thou wish for a bountiful bust?'

"Bountiful bosom... W-What? What is the meaning of this?"

'I am the spirit ruling over giant busts. If thou wert to release me, I shall bestow upon thee—'

As the giant bust spirit spoke—

Claire reflexively gulped.

"M-Meaning that, y-you'll give me a giant bust?"

'...Precisely. Regardless of shape or size, conferring upon thee the bust of thy dreams is precisely mine authority. Dost thou desire it? The ideal bust—'

"Shape and size of my dreams—"

Claire instantly blushed intensely.

"Whatever I want, just like that...!"

"Hold on, Claire, are you alright!?" "It's totally a trap..."

Rinslet spoke in somewhat of a panic whereas Kamito retorted calmly with his eyes narrowed.

"I-I know okay... From the start, I saw through the lies this thing told to beg for mercy..."

'It seemeth that thou believest not. Well then, I shall open thy eyes and allow thee a glimpse of mine authority—'

The giant bust spirit suddenly shuddered, its entire body flashing.

"W-What!?"

In the next instant...

"Hyah!"

Claire's chest expanded with a boing.

"Huahhhh... What is this!?"

The expanding chest had blown away her uniform's buttons, making her white underwear visible.

Giant breasts as big as cantaloupes, looking like they were about to burst out from inside her underwear.

"N-No way... These are my breasts?"

Instantly buxom, Claire looked at her chest with disbelief.

"Amazing. They're so big, and, so heavy..."

Claire's face instantly lit up.

'Having absorbed countless breasts, a task of this level would not be beyond me—'

"...H-Hey, Claire?"

Kamito called out her name with worry.

"But—"

Claire whispered.

"These breasts were stolen from Rinslet and the girls of the Academy—"

'...So what?'

Claire quietly shook her head.

"These breasts belong to everyone. I cannot accept them—"

Once again, she infused power into the whip that was tying up the giant bust spirit.

"Claire...!"

Rinslet's expression instantly cheered up.

"I don't want giant boobs like this. You'd better return all the bosoms you've stolen."

'...Tsk, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to acquire a giant bust. Forsaking this chance, art thou truly certain?'

"Yes, I do this upon an Elstein daughter's honor—"

'...'

"..."

Claire and the giant bust spirit stared at each other for a while.

'...'Tis my defeat, it seemeth.'

Thus the giant bust spirit stopped resisting and vanished into thin air.

"...M-My bust, my bust has returned!"

"Thank goodness."

Seeing Rinslet's chest back to normal, Claire smiled.

Part 11

A few days later...

Rinslet paid a visit to Claire's room in the same dorm.

"Claire, open up please."

"What's the matter, Rinslet?"

Claire opened the door with a look of surprise. Rinslet was holding a small box under her arm while fidgeting with the ends of her hair.

"U-Umm, a gift of appreciation for last time, I suppose..."

She stammered.

"It's not like it was anything major requiring a gift. On the other hand, I guess I've returned your favor..."

"...? Like I asked before, what is this matter about a favor?"

Rinslet raised an eyebrow.

"This was not easy to obtain but I bought it from a purveyor of magic items."

Saying that, she opened the box she was carrying under her arm and handed it to Claire.

"W-What is this?"

Claire was rendered speechless by the contents of the box.

—It was underwear for the chest. A bra.

Made of top-quality silk, it was covered with adorable lace embroidery. Looking like ordinary underwear at first glance, the only strange thing was the tiny jewel adorning the front tip.

Rather than an ordinary jewel for decoration, it was a spirit crystal of the highest class.

"I heard that simply wearing this will increase the size of your bust."

"Huh?"

"Namely, your bust will grow big just by wearing this when you sleep..."

"N-No way... This kind of thing is too cheating!"

"Indeed, though its effectiveness is currently unknown. However, there is value in testing it out, no?"

"B-But even without using this, I can still..."

Claire coughed as a diversion.

"However... I guess I'll accept it for now. Thanks."

Claire accepted the spirit crystal-equipped underwear.

"Wait, remember to activate the spirit crystal for it to work."

"Yeah, I'm just going to test it out. In any case, how could something like this be effective—"

Part 12

That night, inside the Raven Class dorm, strange sounds and screaming could be heard the entire night.

"...W-What is this, can't stop... Nnnn, hyah, hyahhhhhhhh♪"

The Terrifying Mystery Hotpot Battle

Part 1

One day, after finishing their patrol of the Academy town, Kamito and Ellis returned to the Sylphid Knights headquarters inside the Academy to write their report.

"Fortunately, things are peaceful today too—"

"Mm-hmm. After that match, the Academy's disrupted order has gradually recovered."

After recording the results of today's patrol in her report, Ellis nodded firmly.

Indeed, for the past few days, conflicts and all kinds of problems in the Academy were decreasing at a visible rate.

The direct reason one could think of was most likely the match held one week ago for determining the Academy's representatives for the Blade Dance.

On one side was the Academy's strongest elementalist and former captain of the Sylphid Knights, Velsaria Eva. Yet such an accomplished character had been defeated spectacularly by the team of the current captain of the Knights, Ellis.

Thanks to that, the members of the Sylphid Knights who originally looked down on Ellis began to approve of their captain, thus finally reviving the organization's functionality.

"...Thus, today's work is over. Good job, Kamito."

Putting the report into a file, Ellis stood up from her chair.

Just as she was about to return the file to a shelf, Ellis suddenly stopped.

"...Oh right. I almost forgot this."

Ellis reached for a file on the side and sighed lightly.

"...What's that?"

"Hmm, this is a report about complaints the Knights have received from students. But due to the recent lack of manpower, we did not have the luxury of handling these matters, hence we could only—"

While answering Kamito's question, Ellis flipped through the file with a fluttering sound.

"A few days ago, there has been a rumor about strange noises coming from the storehouse behind the Academy. Since it was quite unsettling, the Knights were asked to investigate, but the matter was forgotten amidst all the hectic work—"

"There's a storehouse behind the Academy?"

Kamito asked with his head tilted. There was only a stable behind the school building without any storehouse to his knowledge.

"...Well, my original dwelling did look kind of like a storehouse."

"L-Let us not dig up the past, okay...?"

Ellis averted eye contact in a fluster, coughed and cleared her throat.

"This storehouse is referring to a building in the forest behind the Academy."

"Inside the forest huh? In that case, couldn't the strange noises be made by a spirit that had gotten lost and entered it?"

"More than likely, that is probably what happened—"

Ellis nodded without rejecting the idea.

"However, there is a part of the rumor that is quite concerning."

"...Quite concerning?"

"Indeed... Apparently, someone has seen a figure inside the storehouse."

"A figure huh... I see now."

Kamito fell into deep thought and muttered quietly.

Only high-ranked spirits like Est were capable of expressing fully human forms. It would be unthinkable for such a high-ranked spirit to be appearing in that kind of place.

"Oh well, it is just a rumor after all. That place has always been involved with all kinds of legends."

"Legends?"

"Indeed. Kamito, you may not know since you are new, but one legend tells of a spirit residing there that has the ability to grant all wishes."

"The ability to grant all wishes... How can such a convenient spirit exist?"

Kamito remarked with a raised eyebrow. If anything in this world was capable of that, it would have to be something on the same level as the miracle of the Elemental Lords granted to victors of the Blade Dance tournament.

"Naturally, this is a rumor circulating among gossiping students. In truth, nosy students have gone to investigate many times in the past, but never found even a shadow of the spirit."

Saying that, Ellis shrugged.

"...That being said, since complaints have been filed, an investigation must be conducted. My apologies, Kamito, but could you accompany me?"

"Sure, I'm actually a bit curious about that rumor too."

As a result, the two of them walked to the storehouse in the forest with lanterns in their hands.

Part 2

The sun had set completely. The forest was totally dark.

The lantern glowed from a sealed fire spirit, illuminating the outline of the building standing in the middle of the forest.

"...Hey Ellis."

"What is the matter?"

"Why did they build a house in this kind of place?"

Looking at it from outside, it did not look like a storehouse no matter what—

Rather, it seemed more like someone's residence, and quite a grand mansion to boot.

"This was originally the headmistress' secondary residence that also served as a research facility."

"...Greyworth the hag's lab, huh?"

Kamito muttered with a bitter face.

Brushing aside the vines around the grated gate, Ellis opened the entrance and entered.

"Using an entire house for storage, that's really generous."

"Really? Back home, the storehouse was converted from an entire ancient castle."

"That's a totally different scale..."

Kamito lowered his voice and remarked in exasperation.

(...Come to think of it, Ellis is a young lady from a high-ranking aristocratic family.)

Due to interacting normally with the girls all the time, Kamito accidentally forgot this fact. If anything, Ellis and the other girls were supposed to be noble young ladies whom commoners like Kamito could not retort a single word against.

"Even so, this place really creeps me out when I look at it..."

The house itself was quite magnificent, but the walls were overgrown with countless brambles and ivy vines, giving off a creepy atmosphere like a standard haunted house... Given such an appearance, it was no wonder that there were so many strange rumors.

"...It's like anything could rush out any time."

"S-Stop saying nonsense...!"

Kamito simply whispered but Ellis shuddered on the side.

"...Ellis, don't tell me you're afraid of ghosts?"

"O-O-O-Of course not! I-I-I will have you know that I am a knight

from the House of Fahrengart!"

Ellis denied with her face bright red.

"...Oh okay. Sorry about that."

Kamito smiled wryly in return and reached for the door handle.

Part 3

...C-Creak... The stairs groaned with every step.

The interior of the house was covered in dust. None of the spirit crystals installed on the walls for lighting reacted when infused with divine power. The spirits in them had probably all escaped long ago.

"Careful or else you might break the floorboards."

"Y-Yes, be careful... Wah!"

Kamito swiftly caught Ellis by the arm just as her step penetrated a floorboard.

"...Are you okay, Ellis?"

"Y-Yes, I suppose, I am fine..."

Blushing bright red, Ellis shook off Kamito's hand.

"L-Let us proceed..."

Clearing her throat, Ellis stepped forward.

Then she stopped in front of a room with a sign saying library.

"According to reports, the sighted figure was apparently in this room on the second floor—"

Gripping the hilt of the sword at her waist, Ellis opened the door.

From behind the door came a slight whiff of odor. The interior of the room was surrounded by bookshelves. The floor had been

carefully swept clean and there was not a speck of dust in the corridor in front of the room either.

"Are these books all part of Greyworth's collection?"

"Yes, they are all ancient texts gathered from the headmistress' student days. But of course, precious grimoires have all been donated to the Academy's library. None of the books remaining here are particularly valuable."

"But if that's the case, there's something bothering me."

"...Something bothering you?"

Kamito walked to the shelves in front of him and reached for the spine of a book.

"This book's cover is way too new—"

"What!?"

Seeing the cover of the book that Kamito had pulled out, Ellis instantly blushed to her ears.

"*S-Secret Garden*...?"

Indeed, rather than ancient grimoires—

These were romance novels of a slightly excessively racy nature, targeted towards girls.

"This one, this one, and this one too..."

Kamito took out the books from the shelf one by one. *Blooming Flower in the Night*, *Young Lady in the Dungeon*, *The Bullying Count*— All books of this genre.

"W-Why are such shameless books here...!?"

"...Well, for some reason, I can imagine the reason."

Kamito shrugged and tapped the cover of a book.

"...By the way, don't you find this lineup of books quite familiar—?"

—At that very moment...

"...Hmm? I think I heard something?"

Kamito suddenly looked up.

"W-What!? Q-Quit making strange remarks!"

"No, it's true—"

...than night... pitch-black darkness... devour the world... harbinger of chaos—

"...!?"

Inside the quiet room, distant and bizarre whispers were echoing.

Kamito and Ellis looked at each other then rushed into the corridor.

...Trial... here... alternate dimensional... portal—

"An incantation of spirit magic?"

Ellis charged at the voice's direction in one breath—

"Ellis, wait up! I've heard this voice somewhere before—"

"Brazen knave, what vile machinations are you attempting here!?"

Completely ignoring Kamito's advice, Ellis opened the room's door using wind magic.

"Kyahhh!" "What is going on!?" "Milady~!" "Hya!"

The storm raged inside the room, causing the girls inside to scream one after another.

"...Y-You!?"

Thus, Ellis froze in her pose, in the middle of releasing magic.

Part 4

"You lot again, problem children of Raven Class!"

Holding the confiscated racy books in her arms, Ellis glared severely at the four girls before her—Claire, Fianna, Rinslet and her maid Carol.

"Y-You've got us wrong..."

"We certainly did not come here to read books or the like!"

Claire and Rinslet were desperately denying the evidence before their eyes.

"Oh? In that case, why is your name written here?"

"U-Umm..."

Claire's gaze escaped to the side.

"Violation of school rules. The Sylphid Knights will step in and handle these things."

"Ah, so cruel!" "You are going too far!"

"Actually, Ellis, aren't you interested in them as well?"

"L-Like, like anyone would be interested in such stupid..."

Fianna's murmur instantly turned Ellis' face bright red in a fluster.

"...In the end, the truth behind the rumor turns out to be Claire and the rest of you."

Watching these young ladies, Kamito sighed in exasperation.

School rules forbade the possession of reading material that could corrupt public morals. To evade the Knights' inspections, Claire and her friends had hidden the books here then sneaked in to read them.

However, Kamito was quite concerned about Claire's attitude.

Claire still seemed a bit restless and uneasy, like she had more to hide.

(...True, Fianna seemed to be chanting some kind of magic just now.)

Kamito looked around the room, made a mess by the wind.

Then he noticed a book that had fallen in a corner.

The wind must have blown it there just now. Unlike the bright covers of the girls' romance novels, it was a grimoire with an aged leather cover. Kamito picked up the book.

"Is this book from the headmistress' collection by any chance?"

Ellis narrowed her eyes and stared at Claire and the others.

"By the way, I heard a strange magical incantation earlier. What on earth was that?"

"W-Well..."

Claire, Rinslet and Fianna exchanged looks in embarrassment—

Then finally, they sighed in resignation.

"...Well, since you witnessed it, we have no choice but to confess."

"Earlier, we were trying out a certain ritual recorded in this book."

"What ritual?"

Hearing Fianna's answer, Ellis raised an eyebrow in doubt.

The girls had discovered *that book* purely by chance.

They were using the library to hide their racy reading material, but discovered the book hidden in the inside of the bookshelf. Given Fianna's excellent aptitude as a princess maiden, she had instinctively discovered this grimoire which definitely held no ordinary power.

Fianna had taken the book back to her room and spent many days to decipher it. Then she discovered that something unbelievable was written in this book.

"...Something unbelievable huh?"

"Yes, what this book records is—"

Fianna paused and spoke with a serious expression.

"The method to summon a spirit capable of granting any wish—"

"What... did you say..."

Ellis gulped.

"Could it be, that rumor, circulating among students..."

"Yes, that rumor is true..."

Fianna nodded firmly.

"Just now, we were here to perform the ritual for summoning this spirit—"

Part 5

A bit of moonlight shot in through the window that was covered by ivy vines and brambles.

Sitting some distance away, Kamito watched as Fianna made preparations for the ritual.

"I-It is just a silly rumor regardless. A spirit capable of granting wishes, pish posh—"

"You can go back alone if you're afraid."

"H-Hmph... I shall confirm the veracity of the rumor at least."

Ellis glared back in response to Claire's taunt. Ellis was taking part under the pretext that a member of the Sylphid Knights needed to be present to supervise the ritual, but in reality, she must be quite interested too.

(...No matter what, it is a spirit able to grant people's wishes, after all.)

Fianna arranged stones neatly on the floor then looked at the grimoire.

"Looks like I need to put a pot here..."

"I have never heard of any magic ritual that requires a pot to carry out."

"Neither have I."

Thud, Fianna placed a pot filled with water onto the arranged stones. This earthenware pot had been taken from the mansion's underground storage, an enchanted artifact with a sealed spirit that finally came in handy.

Claire produced a flame from her hand and lit a fire for the pot.

"...Heat the pot with fire then put in kelp, it says."

Fianna confirmed the ritual's sequence then covered the pot with the lid. Next—

"Could this be the mystery hotpot ritual?"

By the time anyone noticed, Est had taken human form and spoken.

"You've heard of it, Est?"

Est nodded expressionlessly.

"The mystery hotpot ritual is a showdown between elementalists, sharing roots with the Blade Dance tournament. Many an elementalist has fallen in attempts to take on this trial—"

"I-Is it that dangerous a ritual...?"

"Now is your last chance to flee."

Claire smiled fearlessly.

"L-Like anyone is going to flee!"

"I actually feel like running away... But—"

Kamito shrugged.

"Hey Claire—"

"...?"

"Can that pot spirit grant any kind of wish?"

"Yes, of course. But a wish on the level of the Elemental Lords would be impossible—"

"I see..."

Kamito looked at the flickering flames.

(...If I'm lucky, I might be able to find out information about Restia.)

Fianna placed both hands above the pot and solemnly started the ritual incantation.

"—"

"—Darkness summoned, grant us the trial here, alternate dimensional portal, hereby open!"

Instantly, the earthenware pot gave off intense white light, blotting out their vision.

Fianna slowly removed the lid.

Then she exhaled, blowing away the rising steam.

"It appears to have succeeded."

Fianna smiled with satisfaction.

"What is this?"

Looking at the pot's contents, Claire raised an eyebrow and asked.

Inside the pot was an unknown black soup, bubbling and seething.

"The Gate has been opened. Right now, the bottom of this pot is linked to Astral Zero."

"Take turns to eat the ingredients in the pot—"

Rinslet spoke softly.

"The one who remains standing to the very end shall earn the privilege to have an audience with the pot spirit."

Claire nodded nervously.

"...Who'll start?"

Kamito looked at everyone.

"Th-Then I shall begin!"

"Do your best, milady!"

When Rinslet volunteered, Carol cheered for her.

"Hoo—"

Rinslet reached out with chopsticks, plunging them into the soup without hesitation.

...What the chopsticks fished out was a black object that was in the process of melting.

"...W-What is this?"

Rinslet tilted her face, staring at it.

"H-Hurry and eat it—"

Ahm.

Urged by Claire, Rinslet placed the black object into her mouth.

"So sweet... This is chocolate!"

"Looks like the first attempt was quite a lucky strike—"

Fianna shrugged.

"Th-Then I'll go next—Hah!"

Claire swiftly stuck her chopsticks into the pot and stirred the bubbling soup.

"...H-Huh?"

The ingredient she had picked up seemed to have gotten caught somewhere.

"What's wrong?"

"I-I can't lift it..."

Claire pulled hard to haul the object up.

Then—

"...Here!"

The instant she lifted her chopsticks, it appeared before her eyes.

...A gigantic lobster, thirty centimeters in length.

"...H-Hwah!"

"E-Ellis!?"

Ellis screamed adorably and hugged Kamito tightly.

"...W-What a scary face!"

"Hold on, Ellis!"

"What is the meaning of such unruly behavior!?"

"So unfair, I want to too—"

"...Hwah, g-get that thing away!"

Part 6

...However, the likes of chocolate and shrimp could not even be considered a prelude to the terrifying mystery hotpot ritual.

The brutality of the mystery hotpot battle gradually increased.

Ellis forced herself to swallow the melting cream puff in her mouth while Kamito gulped down a chocolate parfait.

"...Urgh, guh, guhguh..."

"K-Kamito, are you alright?"

Seeing Kamito turning pale, Ellis asked in worry.

"Y-Yeah... Th-This kind of thing... I'm used to it... C-Cough..."

"Your voice is trembling..."

When he was a child, Kamito had gone through harsh training at the Instructional School. Shoving all kinds of things into his mouth to survive no matter what, Kamito had acquired the skill of

suppressing his sense of taste through self-hypnosis.

(H-However, this is totally...)

...Holding chopsticks, his fingers were trembling. His brain was resisting on a biological level against the fact that he ate a parfait.

"W-Water... Got any water...?"

"Kamito-kun, you get disqualified if you drink water."

Fianna warned.

Incidentally, as the princess maiden presiding over the ritual, Fianna was not a participant.

...Still, it looked like she was the only one enjoying herself. Was it his imagination?

"W-What a harsh ritual..."

"Kamito, does your stomach hurt?"

Est stroked Kamito's back while he laid down on the floor.

"I-It is my turn again..."

Rinslet extended her chopsticks and reached into the pot.

...But what she fished out was a ragged piece of paper.

The writing on the paper seemed to be spirit script.

"...What is this?"

"Hold on, let me look it up—"

Fianna flipped through the grimoire.

"Hmm... Found it, this is the Double Card."

"Double Card?"

Getting a bad feeling, Rinslet grimaced and asked.

"Yes, you have to eat two portions at once."

"W-What, that is going way too far!"

"Next ingredients are salmon roe and sea urchin..."

Floating up from the bottom of the mystery hotpot were salmon roe encrusted with salt crystals and squishy sea urchin flesh.

"M-Milady, this combination is definitely another lucky hit."

"...If only this was not a hotpot."

Rinslet replied with a lamenting look—

Closing her eyes, she swallowed hard.

"...Ugh, ugugu~"

"Milady, a-are you okay, milady!?"

Holding her throat, Rinslet gurgled while rolling on the floor.

"Now Claire, your turn next."

"I-I know, okay..."

Claire's expression was stiff with a fearful look. She reached into the pot with her chopsticks.

"...? It's another card."

"That's the Skip Card. Skipping over the next person, it is now Kamito-kun's turn."

"Y-You must be kidding me..."

"Kamito, you know you can give up, right?"

"...Gah, I know that. I'll take the plunge—Huh? Another card."

"That one is Reverse, so the sequence goes backwards now."

"...Meaning that it's Ellis' turn."

"...K-Kamito, look what you did!"

Ellis tearfully protested.

"S-Sorry..."

Hence, it was Ellis' turn.

What she fished out of the pot was a piece of fried chicken.

"Ellis, this one is definitely a lucky hit!"

"Yes, the fried chicken's oil protects it from absorbing the soup. You are so fortunate."

"I-I see..."

...It looked like everyone's senses had numbed somewhat.

Part 7

...The nightmarish mystery hotpot battle raged on.

"Gah, chocolate cake, this is gonna turn my stomach..." "I-Is marimo algae actually edible?" "Iyahhhh, I don't want to eat locust boiled in soy sauce!" "Hya!

The young ladies were rolling on the floor as though suffocating, almost like a scene with piles of corpses.

Hence, in the fourteenth round... The first competitor dropped out.

"...Sorry, Carol. I cannot... Cough, cough..."

Rinslet had eaten a crepe soggy with black soup.

"Milady, pull yourself together, milady!"

"...Carol, I leave... Mireille, in your hands..."

"Miladyyyyyyyyy!"

Carol's cries fell on deaf ears. Rinslet collapsed and lost consciousness.

"Your courage was commendable, Rinslet Laurenfrost."

"...Yes, I won't forget your deeds."

Claire spoke to the unmoving Rinslet and reached into the pot.

"Ugh, gugu, uhhhh... guh..."

Claire pinched her nose in suffering and ate the pickled squid... How should one describe it? This was a tragic expression of martyrdom that no young lady would want any outsider to witness.

Even so, the seething and bubbling soup of hell was not something that anyone could fathom.

"I guess it's my turn..."

What Kamito fished out was—

"...W-What the heck is this!?"

The "ingredient" he had picked up was something dripping with black soup.

...This was a kneesock, totally saturated with mystery hotpot soup.

"...Hell if anyone can eat this!"

Kamito reflexively fired a protest at Fianna.

"In this mystery hotpot, even inedible things can appear."

"Gah, for real...?"

Kamito stared at the steaming kneesock.

...Its material was likely silk. Silk came from a silkworm's threads, a type of protein. Since it had been cooked for so long, Kamito supposed it should have softened somewhat.

Indeed, it was not something that would disagree with the digestive system, not something totally inedible... Maybe.

(...I...I have to ask about Restia...!)

Kamito resolved himself and closed his eyes.

Then he bit into this kneesock of unknown origin.

"K-Kamito...!" "H-He is seriously eating it!" "Kamito so perverted...!"

Ellis, Claire, followed by Est stared wide-eyed in shock.

"Ugh, gugu, gugugugugguu...!"

...Naturally, Kamito choked.

"Kamito-kun!" "Wait, Kamito!" "Don't force yourself, Kamito!"

"Guh... I-I'm dying...!"

With the kneesock stuck in his throat, Kamito's consciousness faded away.

(...Fufu, how foolish of you, Kamito. I can't believe you are dying in such a place.)

(...Yeah, I... am a fool, seriously...)

Seeing Restia with a gentle smile, Kamito began to see his life flash before his eyes.

...Then he lost consciousness.

Part 8

"Finally, it is a duel between me and you, Ellis Fahrengart—"

"Upon my honor as a knight, I shall not lose, Claire Rouge—"

Thus, the final battle began.

Right now, the only people active in the room were Claire and Ellis, with Fianna presiding over the ritual. (As a side note, Est had turned back into a sword the moment Kamito collapsed, whereas Carol had taken the unconscious Rinslet back to the Academy.)

The mystery hotpot's thick soup was bubbling like lava from hell, giving off an evil aura.

"...Before the final showdown, I have a question for you."

Ellis spoke quietly.

"What is it?"

"Claire, what is your wish?"

"...U-Umm, umm..."

Claire glanced at the massive bust belonging to Ellis, who was sitting in front of her—

"...S-Someone like you can never understand... It's a secret."

Then she mournfully turned her gaze away.

"Is that so...?"

"And yours?"

Ellis looked at Kamito, collapsed on the floor.

"I-I was thinking, spending a day with Kamito, a date... It is a s-secret, okay...!"

Finally she yelled, blushing intensely.

"So unfair, you clearly asked me first—"

"D-Didn't you refuse, saying it was a secret too!?"

"Now now, if you two don't hurry up, the time limit will be over."

"G-Got it... Then it's my turn next... Here goes!"

Urged by Fianna, Claire reached into the pot with her chopsticks again.

What Claire picked up was a mass of pure black... As a start, all ingredients in the mystery hotpot would acquire a layer of pitch-blackness from the soup, but this was even blacker than that.

"I don't quite get what this is but... Ahm!"

Claire placed the black mass into her mouth in one go.

"...!"

Then she froze with that expression.

"W-What is the matter, Claire?"

"This is, this is a piece of... charcoal!"

Exhaling a puff of black smoke, Claire collapsed on the floor.

"Why do I get the feeling that she got what she deserved...?"

Fianna shrugged.

"...You win, Ellis... Con... grats..."

Delivering these words with a smile, Claire collapsed completely and stopped moving.

"Claire..."

"This is no time to be mired in sadness, Ellis. Your turn—"

"Yes, I know—"

Ellis put on a serious expression. Once all the other competitors had dropped out, the wish-granting spirit of the pot could be summoned by drinking the final component, the thick black soup.

"Kamito, Claire, Rinslet... I will not allow your sacrifices to go to waste!"

Ellis picked up the pot and began to drink the thick and oily soup in one breath.

"Ugh, gurgle... guh... ughhhh....!"

...This thick soup was the result of mixing parfait, nattō, cream puff, pickled squid, charcoal, kneesocks, etc. The taste had far surpassed the realm of human cognition and was practically the embodiment of the concept of "disgusting" cooked in a pot.

"Nngu, gu... nn... gu..."

Ellis forced the viscous pitch-black soup down her throat and into her stomach.

"I-I drank it... all..."

—At that very moment, the earthenware pot before her suddenly glowed intensely.

"W-What is going on...?"

"The spirit of the pot is about to appear!"

Fianna cried out.

Then *a certain figure* appeared from the pot.

"...Y-You!?"

Part 9

"...So this is what is currently going on?"

...Three minutes later, Kamito finally regained consciousness and remarked with narrowed eyes.

"Hoo, I can't believe you people actually attempted that mystery hotpot ritual."

In front of the emptied earthenware pot, the beauty with long gray hair smiled with delight.

Indeed, what had appeared from the pot was not some kind of wish-granting spirit—

Instead, it was the headmistress, Greyworth.

"Headmistress, I am unsure what is going on either... What on earth —"

Ellis asked with a puzzled look.

Greyworth glanced at the grimoire that Fianna was holdiing—

"This sure brings back memories. It was decades ago when I created this mystery hotpot ritual—"

"You created this ritual, Headmistress?"

Fianna cocked her head and asked with widened eyes.

"It was a long time ago. Back then, Areishia Spirit Academy did not have the Sylphid Knights established so the school was quite disorderly. Duels between nobles happened on a daily basis—"

With her hand on the pot, Greyworth partially closed her eyes in reminiscence.

"With battles going on, day in and day out, many students got roped in and were injured. Judging it to be a serious situation, the Ordesia council decided that certain measures must be taken, namely—"

"This mystery hotpot ritual, right...?"

"—Indeed. Back then, I had not become the headmistress yet."

Greyworht nodded. Instead of fighting directly using spirits, elementalists would settle their conflicts through this mystery hotpot battle. This simple method of battle, which had been used since ancient times, was supported by the majority of students, thus bringing an end to many disputes without causing collateral damage.

"So there is this kind of history behind the mystery hotpot ritual."

Ellis nodded approvingly.

"Then the rumor about the spirit in the pot is—"

"Naturally, that kind of thing doesn't exist—"

Greyworth shook her head calmly.

"However, there was a system where the Academy would reward victors of large-scale mystery hotpot battles. Raising their in-school ranking, pardons from punishment, stuff like that. I suppose that rumor probably started circulating among students after this system was abolished, gradually taking on the current form."

What had summoned Greyworth from the pot was the teleportation spell she had set up for rewarding winners. Most likely, she had forgotten to erase the Transfer magic seal and left it there.

"...Oh well, and here I was thinking it could be true."

Kamito slumped his shoulders in disappointment.

"But in a certain sense, the rumor is true—"

"What do you mean?"

Ellis asked the smirking witch.

"If you possess the physical endurance and mental strength to emerge victorious from the harsh mystery hotpot battle, as well as

the determination to realize your wish, then the vast majority of wishes will come true in the end, right? That's the meaning."

"What twisted logic..."

Kamito retorted with narrowed eyes... However, she did have a good point. Ultimately, what granted wishes was human willpower, a principle that could not be any simpler.

"I see now. What grants wishes is human willpower huh..."

The straightforward Ellis was moved and recorded these words in her notebook.

"But this mystery hotpot ritual was quickly abolished in the first place. That was after the founding of the Sylphid Knights, thus creating defenders of order in the Academy..."

"I see..."

"I'm so glad that this horrifying system is gone—"

Glancing at Claire who was still collapsed unconscious on the floor, Kamito sighed.

"...Oh well, now that the truth of the rumor is cleared up, the mission of the Knights is accomplished."

"Yes. Let us return to the Academy to prepare a report. And this is to prevent further casualties from appearing ever again."

Ellis stood up and smashed the pot using wind magic.

"...By the way, in the end, what wish did you make, Ellis?"

"...~U-Umm... It is a secret, okay!"

Ellis cried out, blushing intensely.

Elementalists on Break

Part 1

There was a certain stone-paved street running across Ordesia's

territory, commonly known as the "King's Road." Currently, a horse-drawn carriage decorated with a wolf's emblem was advancing slowly along this street.

"...By the way, are we there yet? That hot spring town."

"Almost there, it's just over that mountain—"

As the carriage clattered along, Claire pointed at the other side of the mountain afar.

"That's not really a distance you can call 'almost there.'"

Kamito narrowed his eyes and muttered. The sun was currently right overhead. It would definitely be night by the time they crossed the mountain to reach their destination.

"That cannot be helped, Kamito-san. Our destination, the Vornos hot spring, is a secret and remote spring where spirits gather. Spirits would not come if it were located too close to settlements."

"Mm-hmm, and if you bear with it all the way, it will feel more touching when you arrive at the hot spring, right?"

"Well, even if you say that..."

Confronted with replies from Rinslet and Ellis who were sitting opposite him, Kamito could only shrug.

—The whole affair started the previous day.

After winning against Velsaria in the selection tournament and securing their eligibility to compete in the Blade Dance, Team Scarlet's members were granted an exemption from all classes during the week prior to the main event according to school rules. This was to strengthen bonds and tacit understanding within the team through a week of self-determined activities.

This was doubly true for Team Scarlet whose members had only gathered together as one team recently. Their unity was definitely far worse than that of Team Cernunnos, also from the Academy.

To overcome this weakness, Claire's solution as the leader was to visit the former Elstein territory to hold a training camp at a hot spring famous for its sacred properties.

...Hence, the group had set off from school yesterday morning. After

spending one night at an inn by the main road, they had entered the former Elstein territory, known for its hot springs, and had spent several hours rocking in a carriage.

...No matter what, Kamito was truly tired of this mountain scenery the whole trip.

"By the way, we clearly would've arrived straight away if we borrowed a flying ship from the Fahrengart family..."

"How could the Ordesia military's flying ships be used for private use!?"

"Claire, are you dissatisfied with the carriage I prepared?"

"A carriage is fine and all, but it's a bit cramped with five people inside..."

Packed tightly inside the carriage body, Claire expressed her displeasure.

Carol the maid had stayed at the Academy whereas Est had turned to sword form, but even so, the interior of the carriage was still quite cramped. Added to that was the uneven road, causing the passengers to be pressed tightly against one another.

"Fufu, but isn't it nice to go on a journey like this once in a while?"

Boing.

"...H-Hey!?"

"...Sh-Shameless ruffian, see if I do not make onion rings out of you!"

"But I'm not an onion, hey!"

"Kyah, stop messing around inside the carriage!"

"Kamito, is it time to eat yet?"

"Almost, almost, just hang in there."

Kamito lightly tapped the hilt of the complaining Demon Slayer.

Part 2

Finally, when they actually reached the hot spring town at the bottom of the mountain, the sun had set and night had fallen completely.

A sloping path with stone-paved steps, roadside lighting with spirit crystals, the two sides of the entrance had statues of fire dragons spewing spectacular flames. Built at the top of the steps was a gigantic shrine with countless spirits flying back and forth in the air in the form of glowing orbs.

"So this is the famous hot spring town of Vornos..."

Getting off the carriage, Fianna murmured with interest.

"Is it your first time visiting a hot spring town, Fianna?"

"Yes. Although I have been to a hot spring truly in the depths of a mountain for a Divine Ritual Institute ceremony—"

"It is my first time too. This looks like quite an interesting place."

"In my case, I have been here many times before, but..."

"Yes, compared to its former prosperity, it's a lot more quiet..."

Claire murmured quietly.

Kamito looked around him. Indeed, for a famous hot spring town, there were a bit too many houses without lighting.

"Before that incident four years ago, the town was much more bustling, there were many more people too—"

Four years ago, no fires could be lit at all in the Ordesia Empire because Claire's elder sister, Rubia Elstein, had turned traitor as the Calamity Queen.

This hot spring town, a mainstay of the Elstein family's, also suffered a devastating blow.

"However, the spirits have returned without problems—"

Rinslet gently placed her hand on the shoulder of the depressed Claire.

In the direction she pointed, a spirit with the appearance of a salamander was crawling on the ground.

"—Yeah, I guess you're right."

Although Claire's expression had turned melancholic for a moment, she returned to her usual cheerfulness immediately.

The five of them placed all of their luggage on Fenrir's back, passed through the gate at the foot of the mountain, then climbed up the stone steps towards the peak.

Although they looked like sheltered young ladies, all the girls here were elementalists who had gone through strict training at the Academy. Everyone ascended the mountain swiftly. The only exception was Fianna, who was now sitting on Fenrir's back due to her lack of stamina.

Even though night had fallen quite a while, there were streetlamps using magic for illumination so the road ahead was brightly lit. Thanks to the countless tiny flying fire spirits, even the darkness inside the forest had lighting.

"Wow. I can't believe so many spirits can be found outside of the Spirit Forest."

"Yes, this mountain is brimming with divine power liked by fire spirits."

In response to Kamito's impressed reaction, Est transmitted her thoughts while in sword form.

"...~Hey Scarlet, wait up!"

"Meow!"

Scarlet looked especially happy. Normally obedient, she was ignoring Claire in a rare display, running around on the steps.

"Seriously..."

"Well, Scarlet must be happy to return to her homeland after a long absence."

"My Fenrir is the same. Whenever he returns to the Laurenfrost home, he rolls around in the snow like a dog."

"...? Isn't he just a big dog?"

"...Excuse me, Your Highness! Please note that Fenrir is a proud dire wolf!"

"Woof!"

"M-My apologies, I have always regarded him as a dog..."

Looking down at the fluffy Fenrir, Fianna was quite shocked.

Part 3

When they reached the middle of the mountain, they could start to see a bit of light.

Kamito and company had left the main path leading to the peak, instead taking a side route towards steam drifting from the hot spring. Indeed, there were no illuminated buildings visible nearby.

After more walking up the slope...

"This place..."

Claire stopped.

"Eh—"

What came into view before their eyes was a magnificent mansion built by clearing out a patch of forest. This was originally the Elstein family's secondary residence, but unlike the gaudy trappings of ordinary nobles, it gave off a modest and sturdy impression instead.

"This place hasn't changed much either..."

Looking up at the mansion's entrance, Claire murmured quietly.

The center of the gate looked like some kind of crest had been taken off. Most likely, it was where the Elstein family's red lion emblem

was hanging in the past.

Claire bit her lip hard and walked through the gate.

Out from the house came a slightly plump old lady to greet them.

"It has been a long time, Jira."

"Indeed, Milady Claire, it has been a long time."

"Who is she?"

Fianna asked.

"Jira used to be the head maid serving the Elstein family. After their lands and castles were confiscated, she became the manager of this hot spring inn that is open to the public."

"The Lord Duke looked after me very much in the past."

The old lady carefully bowed her head.

"You look to be in good health. I am so glad."

"Naturally, since the spirits that had left this forest have returned as you may know. This is all thanks to Lady Ren Ashbell's success in quelling the Fire Elemental Lord's wrath."

"...!"

"What's the matter, Kamito?"

Ellis looked at Kamito in puzzlement with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, nothing, it's nothing at all."

Kamito hastily waved the matter away.

"Milady Claire, you have grown so much..."

Overcome with emotion, the old lady embraced Claire.

"W-Wait, Jira..."

"Although her bust size has not changed at all—"

"...W-What did you say!?"

Gnashing her teeth, Claire snarled at Rinslet for making a snide remark on the side.

On the other hand, Jira widened her eyes in surprise.

"Oh my, to think that milady, who used to be so timid and meek..."

"Timid and meek?"

Kamito raised an eyebrow on reflex.

(...Did I hear that wrong? Just now, I think I heard something unbelievable...)

Part 4

Former head maid Jira led Kamito's group into the mansion.

The house was originally magnificent, but since all the valuable furniture had been confiscated by the Empire, there was a desolate feeling contrasting with the vast empty space.

Not only was there a lack of furniture but also personnel. Jira explained that the staff originally working here had quit one after another. Currently, the only ones remaining, including herself, were all formerly in the service of Duke Elstein's family.

"I have prepared the best room for you."

Jira walked up the stairs and opened the door to a room on the second floor.

"Wow..."

It was definitely a huge room. Although five luxurious beds were arranged side by side, the room did not feel cramped at all. Spirit crystals were set in the ceiling, illuminating the room brightly.

"But Milady, are you sure it is alright to room with a boy?"

"...K-K-Kamito is my contracted spirit, okay!"

Claire cried out, slightly flustered.

"...I understand. Fufu, milady sure has grown up."

The old lady smiled with apparent comprehension.

"From the window here, I can see the forest scenery—"

"Yes, the sight of flying spirits makes it almost like Astral Zero."

Having walked to the window side, Ellis and Rinslet exclaimed with excitement.

Suddenly, someone tugged Kamito's sleeve.

"Kamito, is dinner not ready yet?"

Kamito was confronted with those lucid violet eyes staring at him. By the time he noticed, Est had transformed from a sword to human form.

"I'm hungry too."

Claire nodded in agreement.

"Dinner is already ready for you all. We have obtained some excellent venison today."

...Half an hour later.

At the dining table, the chef's prided dishes were being brought out one after another.

There was salad made from wild vegetables gathered from the mountain, hot pumpkin soup, beans stir fried with butter, freshly baked walnut bread, river fish pie, and the main course was deer steak thoroughly seasoned with spices.

"Kamito, am I allowed to eat all of this?"

Despite her lack of facial expression, Est was asking with glimmering eyes.

"Yeah, you can eat as much as you like."

"Kamito, I am so happy♪"

Kamito also began to slice his deer steak. As soon as the knife sank into the steak, meat juices filled with the flavor of spices flowed out

onto the plate.

"This is amazing!"

"Yes, it even rivals the quality of renowned restaurants in the imperial capital."

"Deer steak is a famous specialty of the Elstein territory."

Hearing praising comments from Kamito and Fianna, Claire proudly puffed out her chest.

"...Hmm, so Kamito likes this kind of seasoning. I'll take a note of that."

"May I take some of this meat for Carol who stayed behind at school?"

"Of course, no problem at all."

The chef took out a large piece of meat. Rinslet summoned Fenrir to instantly froze the meat, then had Fenrir swallow it into the dimension inside his stomach.

"Won't Fenrir eat the meat?"

"My Fenrir will not do anything as low as eating without permission!"

When Kamito asked without thinking, Rinslet replied somewhat angrily.

Once everyone had eaten their fill, Jira appeared again.

"Milady, I have come to take you and your friends to the hot spring. The water temperature is just right..."

Part 5

Kamito was taken to a place some slight distance from the inn, a hot spring in the forest.

Claire and the girls parted from him along the way to reach a hot

spring for princess maidens, located higher up the mountain.

After removing his uniform in the changing area, Kamito ladled water to wash his body then dipped himself into the hot spring. The water temperature was a bit hot, causing some of his wounds from the battle against Velsaria to sting a little.

"...Phew, now this is a real hot spring. It feels like all my fatigue is being swept away."

Submerged in hot water up to his shoulders, Kamito relaxed and commented softly. There was a leyline of flowing divine power in the area of the Vornos volcano. For elementalists, this had an extremely potent restorative effect.

After relaxing his entire body, Kamito looked up and admired the view of the moon between the branches. Then he took off his leather glove to look at his left hand.

(...I've gotten the entry ticket to the Blade Dance now, but—)

Afer three years, the darkness spirit Restia had appeared before him again. Completely different from before, what on earth was she thinking?

At this very moment.

"Kamito..."

Amid the steam, he heard an adorable voice.

"...!?"

Kamito instantly looked up.

As the steam before his eyes scattered, snow-white skin came into view.

Illuminated by moonlight, a pale and naked body. Draped over her skin was glittering silver-white hair.

"E-Est!?"

Kamito reflexively leaned back.

Totally nude, Est was looking down at Kamito expressionlessly amid the steam.

(...W-Why is Est here!? Didn't she go to the princess maidens' hot spring with Claire and the others?)

Kamito felt confused. The water surface suddenly shook, scattering the steam.

Suddenly, two tiny hands covered Kamito's face.

"...!?"

"Kamito, do not look—"

"Huh?"

"Naked feet will be seen..."

While blocking Kamito's eyes, Est replied shyly.

"...R-Right. You definitely took off your kneesocks as is proper—"

"Yes, I have learned hot spring rules properly..."

Est twisted her waist slowly.

With his eyes covered, Kamito felt his heart pounding intensely. Although he was used to seeing Est's body, he had yet to see her naked feet even once.

"...Th-This is the male bath. I remember there's a sacred hot spring higher up where spirits gather—"

Est slowly moved her hands away and gently leaned close to Kamito, pressing her snow-white skin tightly against him.

"To me, Kamito's side is where I feel the most at ease—"

"...H-Hey!?"

Just as Kamito raised his voice while his face turned bright red...

"Hmm, so this is the famous hot spring of Elstein territory?"

"Yes, it's been so long since I last visited..."

From behind the trees, the girls' voices were coming for some reason.

"...Hey, isn't this the male bath? Why are they coming here!?"

With the totally naked Est hugging him, Kamito stood up in panic... If he were caught looking like this, he would definitely get roasted into charcoal or turned into marinated salmon.

"Est, hurry and hide—"

"Did something happen?"

"It's an emergency. Hurry and turn into the Demon Slayer."

Despite some hesitation, Est soon nodded.

"Yes, I am Kamito's sword, your wish is my command—"

Dissolving into particles of light in the air, she turned into a one-handed sword.

Kamito grabbed the sword and swiftly dove into the water.

"—Assassination technique: Water Lily."

This was an underwater concealment skill that he had learned at the Instructional School. The instant before Claire and the girls arrived, Kamito's figure melded into the water.

Part 6

While Kamito was hiding himself, Claire and the girls entered the hot spring.

"The hot spring here also serves as excellent beauty care—"

"This hot spring is a sacred place, everyone, so please try to be quiet."

Fianna lectured the young ladies who were getting excited by the hot spring. Used to going through ritual purification at upper-class venues, they entered the water directly while covering their chests with their arms.

"Hmm~..."

Claire looked around and muttered.

"...B-Breasts can float on water..."

Fianna and Rinslet were sitting by her sides respectively and their breasts were half exposed above the water surface.

"Oh my, Claire has grown a little bit."

"Don't worry, Rubia-sama was very small in the beginning too."

"...R-Really?"

Comforted by the two girls, Claire cheered up slightly from her low spirits.

"B-Breasts are just a hindrance even if they become big..."

Sitting some distance away, Ellis cleared her throat and said.

"Hmm..."

"Just because her bust is the biggest—"

"Such arrogance cannot be tolerated."

The three girls stared intently at Ellis' chest.

"W-What on earth are you talking about... Umm?"

Just as Ellis was about to argue back, she suddenly stopped.

"...What is the matter?"

"J-Just now, I think I bumped into something hard..."

Ellis searched around the water with a frown.

"Something hard?"

"Rocks are hard, right? This is an open-air hot spring after all."

"...N-No, it was not hard like a rock. How should I describe it? It is something I have never touched before... Hwahhhhh!"

Suddenly, Ellis screamed and jumped.

"J-Just now, that hard thing moved..."

Then she looked tearfully at the water.

"There is something! Something is in the water!"

"Eh!?"

Claire reflexively stood up and stared at the water.

Silence. Several seconds later, tiny air bubbles appeared in the water.

"...!?"

The four girls braced themselves on reflex.

"...S-Scarlet!"

"Meow!"

Responding to Claire's summon, the flaming hellcat appeared out of thin air. Scarlet growled bravely and charged into the hot spring.

—Boom!

When Scarlet's claws touched the water surface, blazing flames erupted from them.

"...I-Is it taken care of?"

Ellis approached in trepidation and looked into the water.

Then—

"...Hmm, this is..."

What floated up to the surface was a branch.

"What, it was just a branch."

"U-Umm, b-but that sensation I touched earlier... Was I mistaken?"

Blushing bright red, Ellis tilted her head in puzzlement.

Part 7

"...Phew. I guess I made it out somehow."

Having discreetly escaped from the open-air bath, Kamito returned to the inn and breathed a long sigh of relief.

He originally wanted to hide in the water then exit but once Claire and the girls entered the hot spring, he could not get out. Just as he was running out of air, it was fortunate that Scarlet created a lot of steam. Seizing this chance, he successfully escaped at last.

It was also fortunate that Scarlet the flame spirit had been summoned. Were it Fenrir instead, he would have been frozen into a block of ice and captured.

"...That being said, why did the girls come to the male bath?"

Walking in the corridor, Kamito scratched his head.

"Oh my, you have finished enjoying the hot spring already?"

He encountered Jira who was putting blankets into the room.

"Y-Yeah, I can't stay too long in a bath..."

"Oh dear, and to think I prepared special service for you..."

Jira shrugged with a look of exasperation.

"Special service... Sigh, so that was what happened..."

Kamito massaged his temples.

...It looks like everything was plotted by her.

"Claire would've burned me to charcoal if I peeped."

"Fufu, someone as gentle as milady could not possibly do that."

While Kamito was grumbling with narrowed eyes, Jira waved her hands.

"Someone as gentle as milady..."

(...That's totally unlike the Claire I know.)

Kamito voiced his doubts internally.

"...Kamito-sama, Miss Claire has become able to smile frequently."

Suddenly...

Jira's expression turned serious and she said that.

"...Huh?"

Kamito replied in puzzlement without thinking.

"Ever since her elder sister Rubia-sama betrayed the Fire Elemental Lord and Duke and Lady Elstein were imprisoned, milady had stopped smiling—"

While covering the beds with blankets, Jira recounted.

"The last time I saw milady was when she stayed here before going to attend the previous Blade Dance. Milady had virtually forgotten how to smile, always bearing a cold and grim expression—"

"..."

Kamito listened quietly.

...He could not imagine this at all. As the Calamity Queen's younger sister, Claire had been subjected to hatred and fear from the Empire's citizens. Such a reality was far too heavy a burden for a maiden in the flower of youth.

(But now, Claire—)

"However, milady was able to smile as before during dinner earlier. I am truly overjoyed to see milady showing such happy expressions..."

"...I see."

Kamito thought back to when he first met Claire. Back then, she was like a solitary beast, always forcing herself, to the point of ignoring everything around her.

But having obtained comrades to fight by her side, Claire was gradually gaining confidence in her heart.

"I entrust Miss Claire to your care."

"...Yeah, I got it."

In response to Jira's deep bow, Kamito nodded vigorously.

Part 8

Another half an hour passed.

Claire and the girls returned to the room.

"Let's go, Ellis, take that!"

"...You are too naive. Eat this!"

"Let us all focus our attacks on Claire first, hah!"

"Hya!"

Poof. Poof poof poof.

Pillows kept flying back and forth in the room.

"...W-What the heck is this?"

Sitting on his bed, Kamito asked with half-open eyes.

"Kamito, this is the pillow-throwing ritual."

Est explained expressionlessly.

"You know of it, Est?"

"Yes, the pillow-throwing ritual is an ancient rite with equal standing as that mystery hotpot ritual. Originally, it was a ritual where bags of grain were tossed into the sky as offerings for spirits —"

"...I-I see now. That sounds more like a decent ritual at least."

Rituals came in myriad forms. Regardless of form, there existed spirits that would be pleased by weird rituals of this sort apart from blade dancing offered from elementalists.

"Even so, you don't have to do it in the room, right...?"

"No, Kamito, it is pointless to perform this ritual unless you do it at your lodgings when traveling."

"I see..."

Before Kamito's eyes, the pillows kept flying back and forth.

Oh well, since the pillows won't break things in the room, just let them, Kamito thought.

(...Well, it does resemble those exercises for training reflexes.)

Indeed, one of the exercises at the Instructional School was a similar event. However, instead of pillows, they threw daggers and hand-axes.

"W-Wait, I am not good at this type of... Hmmm!"

Fianna was hit directly in the face by a pillow.

"Now you have done it! Come, Georgio... Hbbb!"

Struck on the side of her head by a flying pillow, Fianna was knocked off her bed.

"Too careless, Fianna."

Claire gloated and puffed out her tiny chest.

"...H-Hey, this is the Empire's princess here, you know?"

...Normally speaking, even being sentenced to death for insolence was nothing unusual.

"Pillow-throwing is a serious competition. Even if Her Highness participates, we cannot hold back."

"Indeed, Kamito. You should join in too—"

"Take that!"

Claire, Ellis and Rinslet threw pillows at Kamito simultaneously.

"...What the!?"

Kamito jumped on reflex and used one hand to strike down the incoming pillows.

"W-Well done..."

Seeing the three girls in awe, Kamito shrugged lightly.

"...Fine, I'll serve as an opponent for all of you."

"Hmph, you won't be talking so relaxed after this. Ellis, Rinslet, we're forming an alliance!"

"Very well."

"Hmm, it cannot be helped!"

"Naive—"

Kamito dodged the incoming pillows in the nick of time.

Next—

"Kamito, huammm...!"

"...Est!?"

Hearing a scream behind him, Kamito turned around with a bad feeling. In that instant...

"Kamito, you're wide open!"

Poof, poof poof poof.

The pillows thrown by the girls all hit Kamito in the face one after another.

Part 9

It was after midnight. Exhausted from pillow-throwing, Claire and the girls collapsed on their beds one after another, then fell asleep, wrapped in their blankets.

Still awake, Kamito rested Est, who had turned back into a sword, against the wall, then lay down in his pajamas on the far bed.

(...It's nice to play like this once in a while.)

His body was gradually cooling down from its elevated temperature. The hot spring's effects were truly no lie. His entire body felt much more relaxed now.

(...In my current state, am I able to use that mystic technique?)

Kamito extended his left hand at the ceiling and made a fist lightly.

—Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance. Three years ago, the continent's strongest elementalist had taught him this mystic technique of the sword.

During the past three years when he had wandered the continent in search of Restia, his sword skills had deteriorated severely.

Despite what bits he had recalled during the battles against Jio Inzagi and Velsaria, he was still far reaching Ren Ashbell's peak form. Even so, he must seize victory in the Blade Dance tournament against the gathering of powerhouses from every nation.

Furthermore, there was another "Ren Ashbell" competing in the Blade Dance.

(...Am I able to defeat her?)

He slowly put down his extended left hand.

—At that moment, he heard the tiny sound of blanket friction in the room.

"...?"

Kamito raised an eyebrow in doubt and stared into the darkness.

In her pajamas, Claire had quietly gotten up from bed. Taking care not to make any noise, she discreetly opened the door and exited the room.

(...Claire?)

Kamito wondered if he should make a sound. From the faint moonlight streaming through the window, he had seen the side of her face and her pensive expression.

Kamito quietly got up and followed Claire out of the room.

Claire went up the steps one by one, arriving at a balcony on the third floor. With her hands resting on the railing in the balcony, she looked down at the town spread out at the foot of the mountain.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but her figure seemed to be trembling slightly.

"Can't sleep?"

"...Kamito?"

Claire turned around with eyes widened with surprise.

Her ruby-like eyes seemed slightly moist.

"...Well, for some reason... I was also thinking of getting a bit of a night breeze here."

While scratching his head, Kamito also started to look out at the scenery at the foot of the mountain.

"What a great view."

"Yeah..."

Claire nodded.

Her gorgeous red hair fluttered in the night breeze.

Kamito did not say anything—

Claire slowly lifted her hand and pointed at the plain in the distance.

"Over there lies what used to be land under the Elstein family's direct jurisdiction."

"Your hometown, Claire?"

"...Yes, but now, there is not even a trace left. Due to the Fire Elemental Lord's wrath, all of it was incinerated completely."

Claire put down her hand and turned towards Kamito.

"I got up because I wanted to come here and see this view of my homeland before the Blade Dance. One day, I will make it possible for my father and mother... as well as my sister to return there. This is my true *wish*."

"..."

...Those eyes, with flames residing in them, looked straight at Kamito. Like flickering flames, there was weakness and fragility, not just strength, in them.

However, Kamito was attracted precisely by this fragility, thus deciding to wield his sword for her sake.

Her flames had rescued Kamito from despair after his loss of Restia.

"Kamito, lend me your strength—"

"Yeah."

Kamito placed his hand on Claire's head.

"...!"

"Of course I will. After all, I'm your contracted spirit—"

Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance - BR SS Compilation

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